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Fantasy AND

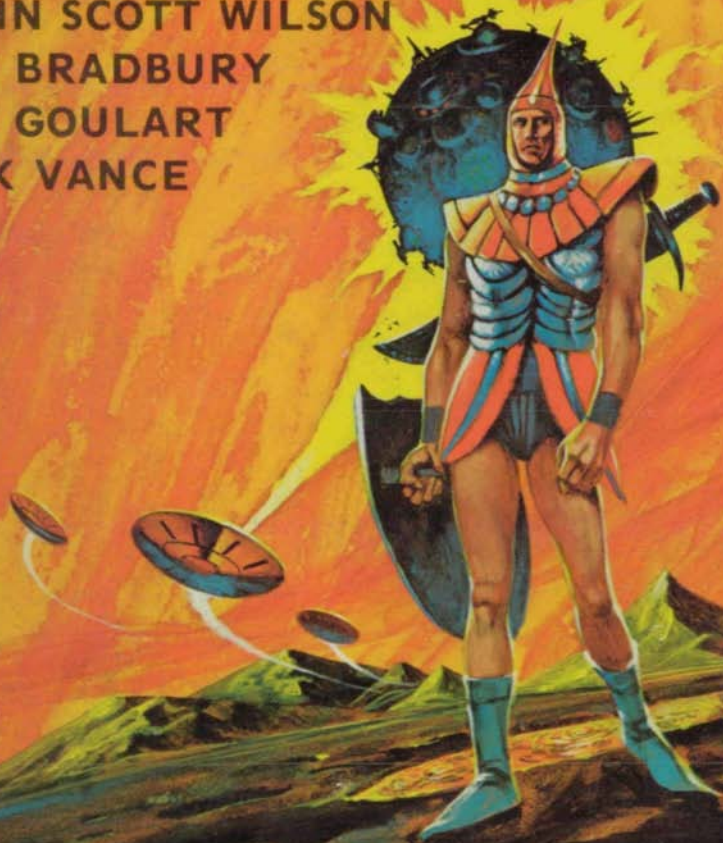
Science Fiction

JUNE

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ROBIN SCOTT WILSON
RAY BRADBURY
RON GOULART
JACK VANCE

ISAAC ASIMOV
The Triumph of the Moon



Fantasy and Science Fiction

Including Venture Science Fiction
JUNE • 24th YEAR OF PUBLICATION

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This story — about what Leonard Agnelli finds after a routine day's work sweeping government offices for bugs — is small scale, mundane and almost photographically realistic. Do not be deceived.

Pax Romana

by **ROBIN SCOTT WILSON**

The afternoon the order came down to sweep the new Control Commission Headquarters, Leonard Agnelli sat in his gray basement office bending paper clips into long-stemmed 4's. Most of them broke in his short strong fingers. Because he had gone through periods of paper clip bending off and on for twenty years, he was mildly interested to see just how few out of a box of five hundred still exhibited a once-dependable ductility. He sat so and so amused himself because it was June and the workload was low, because he sought solitude and surcease from pain, because he could concentrate on nothing — neither pleasure nor work — except the endless rehearsal of his own unhappiness. His wife had left him a week before, ostensibly because of his failures as a father to their two teen-age children, although even in his

despair, Agnelli realized that he was no better nor worse than most in this regard and that the near-death of his son from an overdose, which had triggered, not caused, his wife's departure, was no more than the final settling collapse of a baroque structure that had been cracked from the start.

"They ought to recall crummy marriages like they do crummy cars," he had said to his friend and supervisor a few days before Mary Elizabeth's final departure. "Right after they come out of the factory." Edgars had been properly sympathetic and carefully silent, only nodding his head and making soft clucking sounds. He had seen too many men through the withdrawal from matrimony, and what do you say to an old friend whose life has come unstuck? What consolation for an ending when no new beginnings are in sight?

It was to Edgars, of course, that Agnelli went with the new sweep order. Up the crumbling stairs from the basement he went and into the only slightly less crumbling "executive" offices on the first floor.

"Eddie, hey. Did you okay this sweep order for this new Control Commission..." Agenelli broke off and read the name from the yellow order form, "...this here new 'International Arms Control Commission'?"

"Sure, Lennie. Who else?"

"Well, hell. We're still a branch of the U.S. Government, aren't we? I mean what business we got screwing around with some international goddamn organization!" Agnelli's gruff baritone rose in an irritation that Edgars recognized as more surrogate than real. Agnelli had talked to almost no one for a week.

Edgars held his hands out, palms down, and waved gently, as if to bounce air off his desk and into Agnelli's face. "Calm down, Lennie. Ours is not to question why."

"Well, shit," said Agnelli, leaning against the doorjamb like a squat, dark household god carelessly employed.

"Look, I know what's eating you, and maybe getting out of that office a while will do you good."

Agnelli felt he had to give his

display of unreasonable temper some post facto validity. He fumbled half-heartedly for an argument: "I mean, shit. Haven't we got enough to do around here doing our own outfits? What kind of an outfit is this commission? Who'd want to bug *them*? The Russians are on it, aren't they? And the Chinese? Haven't we got our hands full with like about half the guys not showing up regular and the equipment no goddamn good and all?"

"Look, it doesn't matter that much." Edgars spoke softly, patiently. He had known Agnelli a long time. He had wished a week earlier that he could weep for him.

"Well, hell." Agnelli was running down. He slumped into the battered chair in front of Edgars' desk. "We got enough to do." His voice dropped to normal conversational level, almost plaintive. "You know I don't mind working, and you know what kind of job *I* turn in. But *make-work*. Jeez!"

Edgars was silent a moment. Then in the same quiet voice: "You got anything special on your desk right now, Lennie?"

"No."

"Well, it's like I said: 'ours is not to question why.' Maybe it's the Israelis or the Arabs or the Black Coalition or little green men from Mars or, for chrissake, the Republican Party. Why don't you

go on over there and sweep the place and file a standard negative and go home and get a good night's sleep, and Saturday we'll go out to Morgantown, and maybe it won't be so crowded, and we can catch the races and maybe make a weekend of it."

Agnelli, who was not without self-knowledge, was calm now and once again more aware of himself than of his wounds. He rose to leave. At the door, he paused a moment with his eyes cast down. "Well, shit," he said, and for a moment his eyes rose to meet Edgars', and a faint and painful grin twisted his full lips. Edgars noticed how thin Agnelli's curly hair had become. He felt unaccountably saddened.

It took Agnelli half an hour to find a drivable van in the motor pool; most of the vehicles were in the shop for one thing or another. It took him another hour to gather together an assortment of functioning sweep gear. He made his ritual complaint to the stores supervisor, a touch of his earlier unreasoned irritation in his voice. The supervisor gave it back to him in kind. "Don't you go bitchin' to me, Agnelli! Half this crap don't work when we take it outta the goddamn factory cartons, and the half we got workin', you guys louse up in the field!" Agnelli gave him

the finger and hoisted the two heavy suitcases into the van. One contained the broadband receiver, a high-frequency loop detector, infrared and laser sensors, the omni and the cavity resonators; the other held his handtools, the sonic probe, a variety of optical and ranging devices, and — nestled in its special case — the ultrasensitive high bridge. It was more than he would in all likelihood need, but unlike almost all of his colleagues, Agnelli was a very thorough man, very good at his job. The weight of the cases reminded him of this fact, but his momentary surge of pride gave way instantly to a profound sense of futility: his world had little use for perfectionists, and he knew it. He fought against a resurgence of residual anger, his camel load of frustration so vulnerable to every passing straw. *Who, for chrissakes, would want to bug an office full of armaments info that every major world power already has access to?* "Fuckin' men from Mars," he grunted under his breath as he swung the heavy armored doors of the van shut.

Long habit and his rigid sense of order and workmanship took possession of Agnelli, and mindful of his delicate equipment, he drove with particular care, even leaving the patched and bumpy parkway at Key Bridge to find a smoother route on the somewhat better

maintained District streets. He went west on M Street through Georgetown, an island of affluence where things were repaired almost as fast as they deteriorated. The lights at Wisconsin and at Connecticut were on the fritz again, and sweating policemen waved him through traffic and around the usual quota of collapsed vehicles. Across central Northwest Washington he drove, avoiding the worst of the chuckholes, to Seventh, then south to the library, its crumbling facade obscured by untrimmed shrubbery, and west again on K Street, N.E. He navigated the Black streets to 6th and Maryland. Bright clothes. People jiving around in the warm afternoon. Falsetto calls at his government-gray van. Rocks and bottles clattering against its armored sides. A new crack added to the web that laced the world outside his windshield.

The high rise at 6th and Maryland was one of a cluster of new ones growing like fat weeds out of the rubble of a redevelopment area. Not yet occupied by its first tenants, the building already displayed its shoddy construction. Cracks seamed the facade over the underground garage into which Agnelli drove, and the grounds were littered with construction leftovers that had been too much trouble for the contractor to remove. The loading dock, cast in a

poorly framed form, tilted at a crazy angle. Two of four elevators were out of order, had obviously been so since they were installed, and most of the lights above the dock failed to respond when the guard who checked Agnelli's pass tried to turn them on.

Agnelli wrestled his suitcases into an elevator. It refused to rise above the twelfth floor, and in dim light from a dirty window he carried them across the rough corridor floor into the remaining elevator, which — despite his justified fears — lurched him up to his destination on the fortieth floor.

Only one person was in the littered offices of the International Arms Control Commission, a reedy and stooped young man with a thin beard who introduced himself in a high voice bearing a marked New England accent. "I'm Dr. Collins. You must be the man from the agency."

Agnelli pumped Collins' limp arm once, quickly. "Yeah. Agnelli." He offered his identification, and Collins gave it a perfunctory glance, retrieving his briefcase from a new table that tottered on three legs. "Good, Mr. — ah Nellor. This place is an awful mess. All the other — ah — workmen have left for the day, and I understand you must work — ah — alone, and so I shall — ah — take my leave."

Dr. Swish, thought Agnelli.

"Yeah," he said. "Us workmen do best alone."

"Fine. If you'll just lock the door when you — ah — leave, everything classified is in the — ah — safes."

Collins left and Agnelli got down to work. As he unpacked and began the familiar check-out procedure, he began to relax. He caught himself humming as he walked through the suite on a preliminary visual. The place was a mess. Wrapping paper and crating lay about in untidy piles; rickety new office furniture, imperfectly assembled, balanced on the uneven tile floor. Only the computer room seemed to have been swept up, although it was cluttered with tools and equipment left by the installers. Agnelli felt a moment of compassion for the poor bastards who had to make something that complicated perform, unless computer manufacturers were exceptions to the general standards of industrial workmanship.

Well, that was their problem. Now he was doing something *he* knew, something he was very good at. Edgars had been right. It was good to be out of the office and on the job. He would take it slow and easy, the way he liked. He had a reputation for thoroughness. He had all night. He had no one to go home to. He was not quite able to suppress the thought that the

commission was about as likely a penetration target as Immaculate Conception High School.

He got to work on the office spaces. Audio and optical checked out clean. Telephones: four out of six inoperable; two operable and clean: no induction taps, no passive mikes, no hot mikes, no loading detectable on the bridge. Windows: free of optical or infrared. No laser penetration detectable. Broadband sweep: nothing beyond ambient radiation. No detectable signals on irregular frequencies; nothing on the millimeter bands. Sonic probe: one signal eight centimeters from junction of north wall and east wall. Characteristics: three-quarter-inch reinforcing rod skewed from corner column. Visual inspection: no evidence of wire runs; no evidence of microphone implantation; interior finish generally very poor but typical of structure. No-load characteristics of operable interior wiring: zero. Clean.

That left only the computer, a fourth-generation CDC of a type he had swept many times before. Most of the panels were still off, which made the job easy, and he found the tap on a circuit board in the input terminal control unit almost immediately, although it was as cleverly disguised as any he'd ever seen. It took him a few more minutes to find its fellow on the output circuit, nestled under the

line printer. Both were unfamiliar devices; both were clear in their functions, fascinating in the quality of their workmanship, exotic in their manufacture. He left them in place and tried to call Edgars. Three calls brought him only a recorded intercept operator: "I'm sorry, the number you have dialed is no longer in service or is temporarily out of service. Please consult directory service or try again. I'm sorry, the number you...." He cursed and went back to the computer room to see if he could trace the tap leads. There had to be a wire-run or a transmitter.

There were both. A wire-run, beautifully hidden beneath the floor tile, led to a transmitter of remarkable exterior design and a fourteen-inch dish antenna set in a heating duct. The transmitter was powered by a slave circuit from the computer itself. Computer power on, transmitter power on. With the kind of electronic noise the CDC would generate, the transmitter signal would be virtually undetectable.

He tried Edgars again without success. He wanted him there. He was a better technician than Edgars, which — he had long realized — was one reason Edgars was his supervisor, and he wanted Edgars there to witness his accomplishment. But he couldn't

wait. He unpacked his ranging gear with growing excitement, deepening *contentment*. A fragment from somewhere back in his I.C. High School days echoed repeatedly in his mind: *A hit, a very palpable hit!*

Carefully, coolly, *joyfully*, he took a chordal laser bearing across the horizontal axis of the dish, another across the vertical. On a section of survey map which included the south bank of the Anacostia River, he plotted the horizontal bearing and calculated ground impact of the vertical. He drew a small circle between the river and the Anacostia Freeway and tried to recall the area, looking out a dirty south window into the twilight. Warehouses, he guessed. Fairly new ones. Built since the Last Withdrawal.

He tried Edgars again and then called the agency duty officer and asked him to try to reach Edgars. He gave no explanation, nor was he asked for one.

He replaced the access panel on the heating duct concealing the dish and paced nervously for ten minutes. *A hit, a very palpable hit!* This made it all worthwhile. This made the years in training, the years of doing the job the way it *ought* to be done, worthwhile. This justified it all. The shit, the passed-over promotions, the extra hours, the fidelity. The hard rightness. The clean nose. Mary

Elizabeth would know, would understand...

Mary Elizabeth.

Let no man put asunder.

He could stand the loneliness, the exclusivity of his special new knowledge, no longer. Swiftly, he threw a tape up on the drive, put the computer in stand-alone mode, dialed the appropriate address, and hit the load button. The computer greened a "ready" at him, and he typed:

EC 273F80, THE QUICK
BROWN FOX JUMPED OVER
THE LAZY DOGS
BACK RY RY RY RY RY THE
QUICK BROWN FOX
JUMPED.

XMT A3F, 273F80

BA 274000

With main power on, the transmitter would send and repeat, send and repeat.

Swiftly, he packed up, pulled the heavy cases out the door, down the hall, into and back out of the elevators, across the slanted loading dock, and into the van. Heedless of bumps and chuckholes, he drove rapidly through the catcalls and bright shirts on dark streets and bottles and rocks to the Anacostia River and the 11th Street bridge. Across the river, with a smear of violet in the western sky. Onto the freeway and off again onto the frontage road. Westward

into the smear, now indigo. A solitary, two-story warehouse, deserted. Not even guard dogs.

A hammer takes the lock off the gate. Fix it with Edgars in the morning. Fuck the warrant. Screwdriver and hammer take care of the entrance door. A glance over the shoulder to the north and the cluster of high rises two miles away, almost invisible against the dark sky. Would have to be high in the building to cut down on ground clutter. Have to be as far as possible from power panel and transformers and heavy equipment to cut down on sixty-cycle hum and hits from starter capacitors. West side of building, second floor.

And there it was, in a small room which he would have missed had he not noticed that two adjacent storage bays were considerably different in depth. He had to break through plasterboard to gain entry. After he had done so and was gazing in the light of his torch at the remarkable device before him — only then — did he realize how close he had come to dying; he found the two or three dozen pounds of plastic explosive (it was an unfamiliar color and texture, but he could smell the toluene) wired to a wall switch he had tried to turn on and which, he had discovered to his initial disgust and final satisfaction, was equipped with a throw spring whose

ductility was as great as any man could wish — for a paper clip he was trying to bend into a long-stemmed 4.

The sheer beauty of the thing held him for a long while: the perfection of intricately machined surfaces; the solid casings of the auxiliary electronics, workmanship so fine that he *knew* the components inside had to be of a whole new order of reliability and performance; and the great dish itself, a dozen feet across, poised on jeweled gimbals, silently, perfectly, almost imperceptibly following its target receiver across a dark sky. He wished it were *his* antenna, or at least that he had been the one privileged to install it. It bulked in the narrow room, a squat chalice, a metal-gleaming grill.

This was no Russian creation. Nor Chinese. Nor German. It was, moving slowly, not focused on some spy satellite in synchronous orbit. It was not transmitting THE QUICK BROWN FOX to anything on Earth or of Earth. To make sure, Agnelli timed the movement of the east-west quadrant with his watch. There could be no doubt that it was sidereal.

He stepped back through the hole he had knocked in the plasterboard and then paused and knelt and looked back at the dish gleaming in the light of his torch. He knelt there for a very long time

and then rose and made his way out of the building and back to the van. He drove slowly past weed-filled vacant lots until he sighted a telephone booth. But it had been vandalized, the armored cable dangling like a beheaded chicken. A block further brought him to a filling station with a telephone sign in front of it. But it was closed. Filling stations closed early on that side of the Anacostia River. But then they did almost everywhere. Another booth two blocks away still had its light, but when he put in his quarter, the telephone delivered him a handful of change and went dead. He cursed without much feeling and stared at the silver gleaming in his hand. He thought of the alien antenna and of crude Roman coins he had seen frozen in plexiglass on Father Ponti's desk.

The street was deserted. One functioning streetlamp a block away sent long shadows splaying toward him. The light went out in the telephone booth as if, to acknowledge the demise of the instrument it housed. Agnelli leaned against the booth and wished for a cigarette. After twelve years of no smoking, he wished for a cigarette. He had a decision to make, and it was not at all clear to him. A cigarette would help. He walked back to the filling station and broke the glass out of the door with his hammer. The cigarette

machine was tougher, but he got a pack of Marlboros after a dozen blows. No one appeared on the deserted street. He found matches and lit up. He had a decision to make. "Fuckin' men from Mars," he said, and he was startled by the sound of his own voice in the soft, silent June evening.

When he had finished the cigarette, he picked up the telephone on the greased-stained desk. He dialed Edgars. He felt a little dizzy.

"Eddie? This is Len."

"Yeah, Len. The D.O. told me you'd been trying to reach me, and I was beginning to wonder. Anything?"

Agnelli was a little slow to

answer, the decision not yet quite hardened into resolution. *A hit. Asunder. Fucking little green men from Mars.* "No. Negative. Just wanted to say the Morgantown deal sounds good."

It was Edgar's turn to pause. After a moment: "Feeling better about things, Lennie?"

"Yeah. Thanks, Ed."

"Good. See you tomorrow. Get some sleep."

Agnelli hung up and walked slowly back to the van, tossing the pack of cigarettes into a vacant lot. He would go home and get some sleep all right.

But first he had to repair the plasterboard, and maybe even fix that light switch.

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These are desperately fragmented times. The Presidential campaign just past was most notably lacking in leadership — the winning candidate won by being less visible than the losing candidate. If a few years ago, Dylan and the Beatles were the two clear leaders of popular music, today there are no leaders but only factions. More than ever previously, the way to succeed in rock music is through Decadence and Contempt. We may yet see Alice Cooper and David Bowie surpassed by the ultimate in Decadence and Contempt — three young men with short hair dressed in Kingston Trio candy-stripe shirts.

The fragmentation cuts all through our society. It affects sf, too. In the middle Sixties, fandom had a robust period. Today fandom is a mass of small exclusive factions and the most vigorous fan magazines are not the large general interest creatures of yore, like *Science Fiction Review*, but small circulation, Xeroxed, for-your-eyes-only personalzines whose names may not even be publicly mentioned — like *Egotismo* and *Cloaca*.

Five years ago, Roger Zelazny and Samuel R. Delany were the major talents in science fiction, the leaders of sentiment and fashion. The most that any aspiring sf writer

ALEXEI PANSHIN

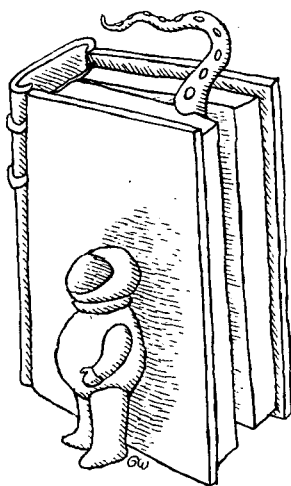
Books

The Astounding-Analog Reader, Vol. 1, ed. by Harry Harrison and Brian Aldiss. Doubleday, 530 p. \$7.95

New Dimensions II, ed. by Robert Silverberg. Doubleday, 229 p. \$5.95

The I.Q. Merchants, by John Boyd. Weybright & Talley, 218 p. \$5.95

Wolfwinter, by Thomas Burnett Swann. Ballantine, 203 p. \$1.25



could wish for then was to be numbered in their company. Between 1965 and 1967, Zelazny won two Nebula Awards and two Hugos. Between 1966 and 1969, Delany won four Nebulas and one Hugo. In more recent times, Zelazny has turned out one bad book after another, and Delany has been entirely silent.

Today, there is no clear leader. There is only fragmentation. Optimists in general have been curiously invisible. Those writers who have been able to write have written special answers for special audiences. The one major writer of the past several years — in fact, the one writer to establish himself as major during these past several years — has been Robert Silverberg, who previously was regarded as a hack or as a minor writer of sf. Silverberg is the rare writer who has been energized rather than sapped by the times. He has offered a barren despairing worldview — if you like, one more special answer for a special audience.

But even Silverberg has been no leader of sf, even though some of his stories these past years have won prizes. It is not altogether an accident that the Hugo winning novel last year — Philip Jose Farmer's *To Your Scattered Bodies Go* — should have been written twenty years ago. The sf audience is so divided that in order to find an

area of common agreement, it was necessary to look to a revenant. The winner of the Nebula Award, Silverberg's *A Time of Changes*, could do no better than fifth in the Hugo balloting.

Some of the tenor of these times may be glimpsed in the books present this month for review:

The Astounding-Analog Reader, Volume One is a collection of fifteen stories published in *Astounding* between 1937 and 1946. It is, apparently, meant to serve an historical function. It is to be the first of several books that will give a sense of the course of what has been our strongest science fiction magazine as it has changed and developed through the years. This is a job eminently worth doing, and I asked specifically for the opportunity to read and review this book because I assumed I would be able to speak well of it. However, even though in terms of the stories it contains this is generally a strong and readable book, I can't speak well of it. In spite of the stories it contains, this book is not what it might have been or ought to have been. It is, in fact, a book of our times. It is aimed at a very narrow audience — or rather, at two narrow audiences — and it will be useless for practically anyone else.

If a book like this is to be done, the editors have the obligation of

reading *Astounding* year by year from the its beginnings in 1930. They ought to choose stories typical of the times and typical of the magazine. They might well look for forgotten masterpieces. Their commentary ought to set the material in a context that illuminates it for our time. This is the minimum that should be asked.

In actual fact, the editors, Harry Harrison and Brian Aldiss, have done a bad job. They have not edited historically. They have chosen to edit nostalgically. Both were born in 1925 and first began to read the magazine in the late Thirties. In consequence, they have honored the impressionable young people they were then at the expense of doing what needed to be done in this book.

Their commentary is less historical than it is an attempt to express their feelings in reading the magazine once upon a time. This means that they rely heavily on exclamation-pointed gush — broken occasionally by fits of condescension when their present adult selves momentarily reassert themselves.

It means also that they have relied on their memories in writing their commentary, and their memories have led them to make mistakes. For instance, they state that Isaac Asimov's *The Naked Sun* was not published in *Astounding*,

the magazine they are honoring. In fact, it was. I know, because its serialization occurred during my own impressionable days in 1956. Again, they ascribe the original publication of John Campbell's "Forgetfulness," which they reprint, to 1932, when in fact it was first published in 1937. Not a small mistake, and one that is not a typo because it is repeated.

It means that they have ignored entirely all the issues of *Astounding* published between January 1930 and June 1937, one can only presume because they were not yet reading the magazine in those days and are not familiar with the stories. It means that instead of rereading *Astounding* issue by issue and making their selections on the basis of adult judgment, they have chosen to reprint stories that made the greatest impression on them when they were young. This has led them to include a few strange choices, like P. Schuyler Miller's "Trouble on Tantalus," which they may have loved at age 15, but which were not respected by the readers of *Astounding* even when they were first published. And it has led them to make a great many over-familiar choices like "Nightfall," "By His Bootstraps," "City" and "First Contact" that are readily available in other anthologies. These selections might have been more acceptable if the time scale of the

book were smaller, but they won't do in a book that offers only fifteen stories from a ten year period.

Let it be said that there are good stories here, like an early Alfred Bester piece, "The Push of a Finger," and the Kuttners' "Vintage Season" and Frederic Brown's "Placet Is a Crazy Place." And I do honor Harrison and Aldiss for the brilliant stroke of leading the stories with the original Campbell blurb lines. These, more than anything else in the book, do give some of the flavor that *Astounding* once had.

In the end, however, even young readers will be familiar with much of this book. And they will get small use from the commentary, which, I suspect, will seem nearly incoherent. Older readers, whose nostalgia might be touched, will find small use in this book, either, unless their nostalgia happens to coincide exactly with that of Harrison and Aldiss in the few unfamiliar stories they have chosen to include. Ultimately, then, *The Astounding-Analog Reader, Volume One* is designed for two audiences. One is librarians, who will buy anything if the premise sounds good enough. The premise in this case is a world-beater. The other audience is the editors themselves. They, more than anyone else, and almost exclusively, will enjoy this book.

But the major and important job of documenting the history of modern science fiction with anthologies chosen by an editor who has done his homework rather than relying on the recommendations of his fifteen-year-old self still remains to be done. The best solution might be retrospective best-of-the-year collections, fat volumes that do give a fair sense of the historical development of sf. Books like these will come, but apparently not this year.

Robert Silverberg's *New Dimensions II* is, on the face of it, a book of our times. This is an anthology of eleven original stories, and, as the editor points out, most of the authors — Tiptree, Malzberg, Bryant, Dozois, Effinger and Eklund — are writers of the Seventies. In terms of content, this is even more a book of our times. All of the stories but one — an Isaac Asimov story of a complex scientific problem resolved by recourse to the simpler science of the twentieth century — are set in the present or near future. And the problems they recount are the problems of the present blown up to insoluble proportions.

The editor of the book says that these stories "represent the yield of a yearlong search for the best work currently being done in what is now one of literature's most exciting

branches... Too long self-ghettoized as a simple-minded species of juvenile adventure fiction, science fiction has for some time now been struggling back toward the heights it reached in the hands of such masters as Wells, Huxley, Orwell, and Stapledon: we hope to extend and continue the present movement away from clichés and clumsiness, toward deeper insight, vision, and craftsmanship."

The actual result, however, as we see it here, is exciting only if you find excitement in an emphasis of style over content and mature only if you find maturity in contemplation of frustration and madness. That is, this collection is aimed to satisfy one fraction of the sf audience, the part which actively enjoys being stylishly bummed out. These stories might best be summed by a quote from one of them, Gardner Dozois' "King Harvest":

"Now his fury had drained away, leaving only a scummy residue of futility. There was nothing he could do — it was too late for anything."

The Astounding-Analog Reader provides an interesting contrast with *New Dimensions*. The stories in *New Dimensions* are clearly better written. The level of writing skill has risen incredibly in the last thirty years. Frustration is not absent by any means in the stories

of the early Forties. "By His Bootstraps" and "Nightfall" reach dead ends as final as any conceived in these new stories. But the fiction in *The Astounding-Analog Reader*, taken as a whole, has a vitality and a sweep of imagination that is altogether missing in the constricted and nihilistic stories in *New Dimensions*.

An even better comparison might be drawn between these *New Dimensions* stories and the Bomb-haunted short stories that choked *Astounding* in the later Forties. Just as the writers of that day could not see beyond the compulsive vision of Atomic Doom, so these responsible writers of our day cannot see beyond the various dooms they find in embryo all about us. But I am willing to wager that these stories will seem as limited, one-sided and ultimately uninteresting twenty-five years from now as, say, Theodore Sturgeon's "Thunder and Roses" does today.

From the above, I suppose it should be obvious that I am not a member of the audience for this book — though I would not doubt for a minute that there is one. For the record, however, let me say that I admired Joanna Russ's active symbol invention, even if I found her story, "Nobody's Home," obscure. I would have liked Barry Malzberg's "Out from Ganymede"

more than I did if I had not previously read effectively the same story twice before from him. I respected Gordon Eklund's "White Summer in Memphis." But the only story in this book that I actively enjoyed was R.A. Lafferty's "Eurema's Dam".

John Boyd published his first sf novel in 1968. *The I.Q. Merchants* is his seventh sf novel in five years. In reading this book, I made the off-hand guess that he was between fifty and fifty-five years of age. In checking afterward, I discovered that he is fifty-three. That I could make that kind of guess, and that the guess was correct, may indicate that this book, too, will be satisfying only to a partial audience.

The I.Q. Merchants sets a problem. Like the stories in *New Dimensions*, the problem is of this moment, as the setting is the present. Unlike the stories in *New Dimensions*, *The I.Q. Merchant* does attempt a solution.

The protagonist of this story, the owner of a small California pharmaceutical corporation, injects his retarded son and himself with a drug that has raised the intelligence of forty percent of the lab animals it has been tested upon. It has killed another forty percent and left twenty percent unaltered. The drug turns the son into a superman,

and leaves the protagonist unaltered. This is the nominal situation. What is actually being symbolized here, it soon becomes apparent, is the alteration in consciousness that we presently like to call the Generation Gap, even though it is clearly something more than that.

I was able to guess the author's age so closely because the story he writes is so patently the product of a man on the farther side of the gap who finds the change in consciousness horrifying. In fact, so horrifying that he is unable to deal with it honestly.

The son and other eventual supermen are painted as monsters. And they do act monstrously. They knowingly kill off forty percent of the human race to turn another forty percent into Things like themselves.

Boyd finds his solution to this problem by promoting the protagonist and a percentage of those others who do not seem to react to the drug to the status of double-superman. At the conclusion, they have plans to escape Earth and split for the stars.

This is not a true solution for two reasons. One is that there is no real solution. The double-supermen avoid, evade and flim-flam the single-supermen. They never come to terms with them. They have no true confidence in their own putative superiority. The other is

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that the protagonist himself is responsible for all the monstrousness we have been given leave by the author to condemn, but neither the author nor the protagonist is willing to accept responsibility. The author disguises the protagonist's true powers until the end of the book when they are brought out as a surprise. We then learn that certain episodes in the story that we took to mean one thing were disguised by the author and really meant something quite different. The result, however, is that taken the first way, the episodes mean that the protagonist is guilty of nothing more than turning his son into a superman and unleashing

him upon the world. But if the protagonist was a super-superman all along, then unmistakably he himself is ultimately and knowingly responsible for the deaths of forty percent of the human race, and responsible for turning another forty percent into super-Things.

The protagonist never admits to knowing this. Boyd never admits to knowing this. The result is a pernicious book. "Pernicious" is not an adjective I use lightly, but I am quite serious in using it now. Boyd has fooled himself and is trying to fool the reader — and the result is morally objectionable.

If *New Dimensions* and *The I.Q. Merchant* are unable to deal

with the problems they raise or resort to trickery and false solutions, Thomas Burnett Swann does present a problem and solve it honestly in *Wolfwinter*. But his book is no less special.

Swann is a poet and university professor with a love for the Greco-Roman. He has been turning out a series of delicate, pastoral Arcadian fantasies, filled with fauns and centaurs, for about the past ten years. If *New Dimensions* is like the Atomic Doom stories of the late Forties, *Wolfwinter* is like the other hallmark of those schizoid times, the romantic novels of remote futures and other dimensions that were being published in *Startling Stories*, of which Arthur C. Clarke's *Against the Fall of Night* can serve as an example.

Here is a taste of Swann's prose:

"How a Faun decorates his house is entirely up to him, and Fauns are not renowned for tasteful decorations or even comfort, since they like to live as close to the earth as possible and consider furniture, like clothes, an encumbrance. But every tree contains in its uppermost branches a railed platform, a kind of lookout nest with a chest of provisions, reached by a rope ladder, in case of attack by wolves... Between the briar fence and the house is an area where the Faun grows his vegetables. He will eat

practically anything, including leather sandals, but he prefers greenery. However, as in the case of Skimmer, he also relishes the meat of herbivorous animals like beavers, who feed on bark and roots. In his garden you are likely to find radishes, cabbages, turnips, onions, and other vegetables, as well as a covey of quail, whose wings have been clipped to prevent their escape, for they are much prized as pets and only eaten in case of a siege by wolves."

In order to find a problem that can be honestly solved, Swann must give us fauns, a young girl, and her half-faun son threatened by Death Wolves in an Etruscan wood twenty-five hundred years ago. That is a long way to go for a solvable problem, but if you badly need a book that isn't frustrated or dishonest, you might try this one. *Wolfwinter* is the strongest book by Swann that I have read.

If this column is a review of books you don't want to read or are sorry that you have read; if you despair of fragmentation; if the times seem impossible; if sf seems to be dying — remember this. We have been here before and survived. Sf has had periods like this one before — we will outlive it. Hang on. Good times are coming again. Good times will come.

Dennis Etchison ("The Smell of Death," October 1971)
returns with a superior story that links an operation of the
future with the dark legends of the past.

Calling All Monsters

by DENNIS ETCHISON

The first thing I see is the white light.

And I think: so they have taken me to one of those places. I knew it. That was why the pain. My brain stops spinning like a cracked gyroscope long enough for me to relax. Then I get it, all of it. And I think I may go mad, if it is true.

A rubber hand closes my eyes and I see red again. Black lightning forks shimmer in a kind of bas-relief in front of me. Then the whirling stains settle in. I think they are Rorschach tests. The black shapes flow like ink on a blotter. I look into the first one. It seems to me to be an accident. I see a car, no, two cars, and the smaller one is jackknifed over the big one. Then the pain starts again at the back of my head, not throbbing like before but only dull and steady like a hot light bulb; so I try not to think any more about the ink blot.

The voices again over me. They drone, too slow, hurting my ears, trying to seep in through the hardening blockages I can feel there, especially the low one that sounds like the man has a greasy tongue. I want them to stop but they continue, the greasy tongue bending closer. Then I understand, but don't understand, because I know he must be speaking a foreign language. I want the sound to stop. They always speak in foreign languages or at least thick, oleaginous accents, slow and heavy until they give the orders, then harsh and guttural. I remember. I want it to stop because it hurts me. Don't they care? It hurts me!

"I'm sorry," says the man, slipping his hands into his coat pockets. "But it's too late for us to do anything."

But of course it hurts me. That is part of it. I remember now. It is always that way. They even called it the House of Pain once, didn't they? Yes, and the accent oppressive and stressed where you didn't expect it to be, and he never bothered about anesthesia. I believe he said it was a shortage of supplies on the island, but I don't believe that. I think for him it was a House of Pleasure.

Yes, that is what they are doing. That is what they are doing. Maybe I keep forgetting, keep drifting off because it is less painful that way. My heart doesn't speed when I think of it. You would think it would. All I feel there is the hardness, cold and brassy and clammy, over my heart. I don't understand that part yet, but somehow it seems to fit.

I am bound. I know that now. The cool pressure around my rib cage loosens like a mummy's fingers, and the cold lifts from my heart, leaving a sticky spot there. I strain mightily to move my arms and legs, but still they won't work. Strapped. I get it more clearly. Lifting, there was lifting right after the start of the pain, and even then I couldn't move, so I must have been bound even then, and more lifting, always higher. But I played it smart. I kept my eyes closed. I knew what was coming. I didn't need my eyes to tell me where they

were taking me. It was up lots of stairs, almost always, the top of an old building, tons of sweating stone blocks crumbling in the mortar and piles of dust and powdered limestone in corners where the torches never reached, and the stairs wound in a spiral up and down, down to the dungeons, but they took me up, up to the laboratory. They always take them up at first. To the skylight. But now it must be night, the light artificial. They always worked at night on the important experiments.

"I'm sorry," says the man in charge, hiding his powdered hands in his white coat. "But it's too late for us to do anything to save him. We've run all the standard tests, and so now..." He makes a helpless gesture.

Something smooth and lightly textured brushes my chin, my lips, my nose, my brow. Now the red darkens. I hear the swish of starched smocks. There are several of them. They move surely, impatiently. So this is a big one. Not just the ubiquitous assistant but others, experts from all over have come to observe. The low voices grind again, like old automobiles on cold mornings with the electrolyte low.

They hurry, I feel it in my skin more than hear it. It must be night.

The air they stir toward me is cold. I grow colder. Even my head. Funny but as the cold spreads up from my neck the spot at the back of my head aches less and less. That is, I suppose, some kind of relief.

But still I am afraid.

I wait for the generators to start up. They always need them for electricity. I hear no lightning. So they must use the generators to rev up their particle chambers, their glowing vacuum tubes, their bubbling flasks of colored fluids, their magnetic arcs jumping and sweeping up and up and up the conductor rods. Snapping and crackling, humming and spinning rotors that whirl and whine and buzz. I used to like them. I think of the lightning bugs I used to collect in mayonnaise jars. They sparked and jumped on the sill all night, and it reminded me of their experiments, and the thought scared me a little, but it was still pleasurable, a sublimely creepy game I played on myself that always slipped me off into a comfortable dream.

The difference now is that I can't wake up.

I hear a hum. They are ready.

"I'm sorry," says the man in charge, hiding his powdered hands in a wrinkled white coat. "But it's too late for us to do anything to save your husband. We've run all

the standard tests, and so now..." He bares his hands nervously and moves them in a helpless gesture.

The woman bursts into tears. "But you can't! I showed you the will, notarized, carried with me all these years! And the copy in his pocket!"

The doctor fumbles through his papers. "I can show you his EKG. Here, see for yourself."

As the machinery is lowered over me on damped hinges, I can no longer feel the pain in my head. Sounds, sensations are receding. I wonder if it is the head they are after. I remember such a head, floating in a porcelain tray, clear tubes of nutrient running in through the nostrils, stained bandages pinned around the crown. The eyes were open, and so maybe it will not be so bad. And the head went on thinking. What did it think? Let me try — yes, the door, the one with the heavy bar in front. And the sliding window at the base for food. Another experiment. The head, released from physical demands, focused its powers to make contact and control. Even the deformed monster from the previous operation. He controlled the creature behind the door, calling it out to smash through the boards and —

But now they fit it over my abdomen. I can no longer feel

there, but I know that is where the instrument is clamping down. That is where they always start.

I wonder if my table is mounted to swivel, to turn me upright. I hear the sheet rustling down below. They may, since I am strapped so completely I can't move a toe or finger. I hear the clasp of surgical steel. It begins.

"I'm sorry," says the doctor in charge, quickly hiding his pale-powdered hands deep in his wrinkled, blood-smeared white coat. "But it's too late for us to do anything to save your husband. We've run the standard tests for death and there is just no response, nothing. I am sorry. So now..." He bares his shriveled hands furtively and moves them in a helpless gesture of absolution.

The wife erupts in tears of frustration and rage. "But you can't operate yet! I showed you the will, notarized, carried with me all these years, since the first time. And the copy of the instructions in his wallet, and the neck chain, you found them at the accident tonight! What more does it take?"

The doctor ducks her freezing gaze and agitates his papers, moistening a finger. "Let me show you his EKG. Here, you can see for yourself, no activity whatever. I'm sorry, but we have to go ahead, do you see? We can't afford to risk any

further deterioration. We have the other clause to consider, the main clause."

For the love of God I can't feel, but I can hear it slicing away. Why can't I feel? They must use anesthetic now, but even so I know what fiends they are. I think I always knew. O now the obscene sucking sound growing fainter even as my hearing dissolves, wet tissue pulling apart. They suction my blood, the incision clamped wide like another mouth a monstrous Caesarean and I hear the shiny scissors clipping tissues clipping fat, the automated scalpels striking tictactoe on my torso and I know they are taking me, the blood in my head tingles draining down down and I am almost gone, O what is it what are they doing to me the monsters ME they must be it can't be that other nono my papers they couldn't do THAT they couldn't break the terms it says in blackandwhite NO so it has to be like those other times I have seen the altered specimen on the table the wrapped composite the sutured One Who Waits drifting in fluid for the new brain the shaved skin the transplanted claws the feral rictus the excised hump promised long ago the suddenly stripped sub-cutaneous map scarred creations. I call you in.

"The main clause."

"B-but that was conditional, you can read —!" She comes close to blowing it then, nearly falling all over herself in a quivering puddle right there in the hospital corridor. She tries one last time. "He — he wanted the contract, a kind of extra life insurance benefit for the children. But it meant more, a lot more to him. It was really the last chance for him to do something for others, for humanity. But he got to be obsessed with the technical question of dying, don't you understand? The exact moment of death. When? He was never sure. When is it? Can you prove it to me?"

"My dear lady, the heartbeat and respiration cease, the muscles go slack..."

"God damn it, you cold fish! He wanted an EEG!"

The doctor backs off, assuming a professional stance. "Your husband agreed to sell his usable internal organs to the transplant bank for the usual fee, which you, as his beneficiary, will receive within 60 days. Neither you nor your husband made any move to break the contract prior to his, eh, demise this evening, and, so, I'm afraid...there is nothing further I am empowered to do. The standard tests of death have been administered in accordance with the laws of the state, and now his internal physical remains belong to the Nieborn Clinic. His personal effects, of course, remain yours — I'm sure they are at the front desk by now — as well as his, eh, other remains, which will be available to you for burial or cremation. In the morning. And now, if you'll excuse me, Mrs..."

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She sobs. There is nothing else for her.

I call you now as always before you must return taste sweet revenge on these the true monsters break in now the floodgate opens the dam breaks the skylight shatters under deathlocked weight the torch is dropped the windmill collapses the trapdoor opens the tank splits and gushes controls are shortcircuited the surrogate returns the animal people cry ARE WE NOT MEN? at last the grafts rebel appendages reborn to murder I call you back I call you in now do not wait come as always to the laboratory House of Pain operating room crypt castle tower NOW I call you where are

you? now I call you I call you I call you ARE WE NOT MEN? O God what forgotten corner have I walled myself into what have I done FOR THE LOVE OF GOD

The vacutrack unit is shut off. The organs are sealed and deposited in liquid nitrogen. The heavy insulated door is closed, and the chrome catch padlocked. Rubber gloves are stripped. Leave the remains for the orderlies. It goes to the morgue anyway. But for God's sake keep that sheet over the face, so curiously distorted at the end.

The operation is a success.

the last thing I see is the blackness

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Here is the second and concluding part of Jack Vance's final Durdane novel. If you missed part one, the author's synopsis will bring you quickly up to date. (We do have copies of the May issue, containing part one, on hand. Send us \$1.00 and we'll rush a copy out to you.)

The Asutra

by JACK VANCE

Synopsis, Part 1: To the land of Shant on the far world Durdane have come the Roguskhoi: a race of grotesque savages, dedicated to destruction and calamity. Their mentors are the asutra, with whom they maintain a symbiotic bond. The Roguskhoi are enormous rust-colored andromorphs; the asutra are small and relatively feeble, reminiscent of furry crabs. Their home-world is unknown, no less a mystery is their motive for invading Shant. Another perplexing question: why have they employed the Roguskhoi and their essentially crude weapons to this end? The asutra have mastered space-travel; certainly they must command the technology to destroy Shant a thousand times over. Are they performing a macabre experiment? Is the invasion of Shant a rehearsal for similar attacks upon the Earth-worlds? These are questions to which no one can supply satisfactory answers.

After a series of racking defeats come glorious triumphs; the people of Shant repel the invasion. Gastel Etzwane, a musician, takes an important part in the great war, sometimes in association with the austere and exasperating Ifness, an Earthman and Fellow of the Historical Institute.

Placidity finally returns to Shant, but Etzwane learns that Roguskhoi and alien space ships have been observed deep inside Caraz, a vast and barbarous continent to the west. Etzwane and Ifness go forth to investigate the report, flying an air-car camouflaged as a small fishing boat. They follow the great Keba river two thousand miles into the interior, then ride pacers across the Plain of Blue Flowers, over the Kuzi Kaza Mountains and finally arrive at the village of Shagfe at the edge of the Wild Waste.

At Shagfe the principal occupation is slave-taking, and a certain Hozman

Sore-throat is acknowledged to be the master slave-taker of the region. But he makes the mistake of kidnapping four girls of the Alul tribe, one of whom, Rune the Willow Wand, has excited the interest of Gastel Etwane.

The Aluls set upon Hozman Sore-throat and overcome him. Hozman Sore-throat, like the Roguskhoi, carries an asutra mentor, whose nerves are joined to Hozman's nerves. The asutra is killed; Hozman becomes abject and helpless. He reveals that all his slaves have been sent up to a depot ship and transported to a far world.

The Aluls commit themselves to a gallant if rash undertaking. They resolve to go aloft in the transfer and capture the depot ship. Ifness refuses to participate in such a venture. He points out that the Aluls lack the competence to bring the depot ship down to Durdane, even should they succeed in taking control of the vessel.

At last an understanding is reached. Etwane will go aloft with the Aluls. He carries an energy gun, which might be instrumental in capturing the ship. Ifness meanwhile will return at best speed to the air-car now moored at the town Shillinsk, on the Keba River, and there make contact with an Earth patrol ship, which will then make rendezvous with the depot ship. The capture of such an alien space-ship will be a great advantage for Ifness in his competition with Dasconetta, a rival Fellow of The Historical Institute and Ifness' nominal superior.

Chapter 7

The suns were three hours gone beyond the far Orgai, and the last purple glow had left the sky. On the

plain waited eighteen Alul warriors, with Etwane and Hozman.

"Here is my usual spot," said Hozman, "and now is my ordinary time. The routine is this. I press the button. After twenty minutes I look for a green light overhead. I then release the button and the car lands. My slaves stand in an orderly line. They are drugged and obedient, but not aware, like people in a dream. The door opens and a pale-blue light issues forth. I move forward, marshaling the slaves. If the car contains a mentor, it appears on the ledge, and then I must wait while the mentors converse. When the slaves are within and the conversation at an end, I close the door and the car departs. There is no more to be told."

"Very good. Press the button."

Hozman did as instructed.

"How often have I done this deed," he murmured. "Always I wondered where they went and how they passed their lives. Then, after the car departed, I would look up into the sky and consider the stars...But no more, no more. I shall take your pacers to Shagfe and sell them to Baba, and then I shall return to the land where I was born and become a professional seer...Stand in line, close together. You must seem vague and limp."

The group formed a line and waited. The night was silent. Five

miles to the north lay Shagfe, but the fires and oil lamps flickered too dimly to be seen. The minutes passed slowly; Etzwane had never known time so to prolong itself. Each second stretched elastically and departed with reluctance into the past.

Hozman held up his hand. "The green light...The car comes down. I now release the button. Stand ready — but limp and easy; make no moves..."

Above sounded a faint sigh and a hum; a dark shape moved across the stars and settled fifty or sixty yards away. An aperture slowly appeared, casting a wan blue glow upon the ground. "Come," muttered Hozman. "In a line, close together...There crawls the mentor. You must be quick — but not hasty."

Etzwane halted at the entrance. A blue glow showed the way within. On a ledge beside a row of colored lights rested an asutra. For an instant Etzwane and asutra looked eye to eye; then the asutra, apprehending its danger, hissed and scuttled backward toward a small passage. Etzwane swung his blade, to chop away the creature's abdomen and block its escape. In revulsion he scraped the jerking parts to the deck where they were crushed under Alul boots.

Hozman gave a whinny of crazy high-pitched laughter. "I am not

yet free of the thing's influence; I could feel its emotion. It was furiously angry."

Karazan pushed into the interior, and the ceiling pressed down upon his head. "Come, let us do the business while our blood flows hot! Gastel Etzwane, do you understand the use of these swivels and pegs and blinking ghost-lamps?"

"I do not."

"Come in then; we go to do what we must."

Etzwane was last to enter. He hesitated, beset by the certain knowledge that their plans were insanely rash. "On this consideration alone may we expect success," he told himself hollowly. He looked back into Hozman's face and surprised an expression curiously vital and eager, as if Hozman could hardly keep from shouting aloud in joy.

Here is his revenge, Etzwane gloomily told himself: on us, and on the asutra as well. He will go forth now to take vengeance on all Durdane for the horror which has been his life...Best that I should kill him now...Etzwane paused in the doorway. Outside Hozman stood expectantly; within the Alula, incipiently claustrophobic, began to grumble. On a sudden impulse Etzwane jumped back to the ground. He looked to where Hozman held the door clamp. In

his hand he carried a length of white rag. Etzwane looked slowly up into Hozman's face. Hozman licked his lips, his brows drooping hangdog low at the outer corners.

"So then," said Etzwane. "You would signal us to our doom, with all the others on the ship."

"No, no," stammered Hozman. "This is my kerchief. It is a habit, no more; I wipe my sweating palms."

"They sweat understandably," said Etzwane.

Karazan lurched forth from the car. He apprehended the situation in an instant and turned a terrible stare upon Hozman. "For this act you can blame no mentor, no evil force which compelled you." He drew his great scimitar. "Hozman, on your knees and bend your neck, for your time has come."

"A moment," said Etzwane. "What is the system to closing the door?"

"You must puzzle it out for yourself," said Hozman. He attempted to spring away, but Karazan lunged to catch the collar of his cape.

Hozman began to plead in an hysterical, tearful voice. "This is not according to our arrangement! And, also, I can supply information to save your lives, but unless you guarantee my freedom, you will never hear it; you may kill me first and, then, while you slave on a far

distant world, remember this laugh of mine." He threw back his head and uttered a wild wail of mockery. "And you will know I died happy, for I brought ruin to my enemies!"

Etzwane said, "We don't want your miserable life; we hope to save our own, and your treachery is our worst danger."

"There will be no more treachery! I trade my life and freedom for your own!"

"Thrust him inside," said Etzwane. "If we live, he lives, and upon our return he shall have a flogging."

"No, no, no!" screamed Hozman. Karazan cuffed him to silence.

"I would prefer to kill the vermin," said Karazan. "In with you." He thrust Hozman into the car. Etzwane studied the door and discovered the inside clamp. He asked Hozman, "What now? Do I pull the door closed and throw down this lever?"

"That is all," came Hozman's sullen reply. "The car will leave Durdane of its own volition."

"Then make all ready; we are about to leave."

Etzwane closed the door. At once the floor thrust into their feet. The Alula gasped, Hozman whimpered. There was a period of acceleration, then ease. The blue illumination made faces unrecognizable and seemed to educe a new

dimension of each man's soul. Etzwane, looking on the Alula, felt humble in the face of their bravery; unlike himself, they knew nothing of Ifness' abilities. Hozman stood limp and futile, with long hopeless creases pinching his face. Etzwane asked, "What is this knowledge by which you will save our lives?"

"It is nothing definite," said Hozman. "It concerns your general demeanor and how you must act to avoid instant detection.

"Well, then, how must we act?"

"You must walk like this, with your arms limp, your eyes blank and mild, your legs loose as if they barely supported the weight of your bodies." Hozman stood limp as if still under the influence of a mentor.

Fifteen minutes the speed held, then slackened. Hozman said nervously, "I know nothing of conditions aboard — but you must strike hard and fast, and make the most of surprise."

"The asutra ride their hosts?"

"I imagine that they do."

"For your own sake," said Etzwane, "fight and fight well."

Hozman made no response. A moment passed. The car touched a solid object and slid into a socket, with a small shock of finality. The men tensed themselves. The door opened. They looked into an empty corridor, along which a man might walk single-file. A voice came from

a panel: "Step forth, into the hall; remove all clothing; you will be cleansed by a refreshing spray."

"Act as if you are too drugged to understand the instruction," muttered Hozman.

Etzwane moved slowly out into the corridor and languidly walked to the far end where a door barred the way. The Alula followed, Hozman shambling in their midst. The voice spoke again, "Remove all clothes; they must be removed."

Etzwane made tentative motions to obey, then let his arms sag, as if fatigued, and sagged against the wall. From the speaker came a faint hiss and a disgusted mutter. From ceiling orifices jets of an acrid liquid struck down, drenching them to the skin...The jets were cut off; the end door opened. Etzwane staggered through, into a large circular chamber. Here waited half a dozen biped creatures, gray and lumpy of skin, squat in stature, batrachian in aspect. Five eyes like orbs of milk-glass protruded from the squad heads; the feet were flaps of gray-green muscle. On the nape of each neck rested an asutra. Etzwane had no need to call a signal. Pent energy exploded within the Alula; they lurched forward; in five seconds the gray host-things lay dead in spouts of gray-green blood, with the asutra crushed and hacked. Etzwane glared around the room, nostrils dilated, the energy

gun in readiness. But no new gray creatures appeared. He ran on long stealthy steps to the end of the chamber where narrow corridors led in two directions. He listened and heard no sound save a low pulsing hum. Half the Alula with Karazan set off to the left; Etzwane led the others to the right. The corridors, narrow and low, had been built to asutra concepts of scale; Etzwane wondered how Karazan fared. He came to a narrow ramp; at the top he saw the gleam of stars. Up he clambered at his best speed and burst out into a control dome. A low bench circled the room; at one area, a dozen small tanks displayed quantities of colored liquids. One end of the chamber was given to a low console, with adjuncts which Etzwane assumed to be controls. On the padded bench beside the controls rested three asutra. At Etzwane's entry, they shrank back against the transparent domes, hissing in shock. One produced a small black mechanism which spat lavender fire toward Etzwane. He had already flung himself aside; the fire struck into the Alula at his back. Etzwane could not use his energy gun for fear of rupturing the dome; he lunged, jerking and ducking across the room. One of the asutra scuttled into a small passageway, no more than a foot square; Etzwane smashed the second

creature with the flat of his blade. The first sidled, hissing and whistling, to the bank of controls. Etzwane seized it and threw it into the center of the room where the Alula stamped it to pulp.

The man who had been struck by the bolt lay staring up through the low dome at the stars; he was dying and nothing could be done for him. Etzwane ordered two men to remain on guard; they gave him truculent stares, challenging his authority. Etzwane ignored their recalcitrance. "Take care; do not stand where an asutra can aim at you from that little passage yonder. Block off the opening if you can. Be alert!" He departed the room and went off after Karazan.

A ramp led down to a central hold, and here lay the captives from Caraz, drugged and torpid, on shelves which radiated from the walls like the spokes of a wheel. Karazan had killed one of the lumpish gray attendants; two more stood submissively to the side. None of the three carried asutras. With a shock of surprise Etzwane recognized the unlovely features of Srenka and Gulshe. In all, two hundred men, women and children lay stacked like billets of timber. Karazan stood in the center of the room, scowling uncertainly from the gray host-creatures to the captives, at a loss, perhaps for the first time in his life.

"These people are well enough as they are," Etzwane told Karazan. "Let them sleep. Another matter is more urgent. The asutra have small passages where at least one has taken refuge. We must search the ship, taking great precautions, for the creatures carry energy weapons; already they have killed one man. Our best advantage is to block off the passages as we come to them, until we learn the plan of the ship."

Karazan said, "It is smaller than I had expected; not a comfortable or easy place to be."

"The asutra have built as close to their own scale as possible. With luck we shall soon be back down on the surface. Until then, we can only wait and hope that the asutra can't call for help."

Karazan blinked. "How could they do that?"

"The advanced races talk through empty space, using the power of lightning."

"Preposterous," muttered Karazan, looking around the chamber. "Why, in the first place, should they go to such lengths for slaves? They have the toad-things, the black monsters like your captive, the red demons, and who knows how many other servants?"

"Nothing about the asutra is certain," said Etzwane. "One guess is as good as another. Perhaps each of their hosts serves a special

function. Perhaps they simply enjoy a variety of hosts."

"No matter," growled Karazan, "we must dig them out of their crannies." He called instructions to his men and sent them off in pairs. Declaring himself too cumbersome to aid in the search, he took the gray creatures to the observation dome and tried to persuade them to take the ship down to Durdane, without success. Etzwane went off to examine the lift car, still in its socket, and could discover no means to control it. He next searched for food and water, which he found in bins and tanks under the slave hold. The atmosphere seemed fresh; somewhere aboard the ship an automatic renewal system was at work, and Etzwane hoped that if asutra were alive and in hiding they would not think to stifle the intruders. What, in a similar position, would he do himself? If a transfer ship were due from the home world, he would do nothing, but allow the problem to be solved by exterior means...Two by two the Alul warriors came to report. They had discovered the drive system, the energy generators, the air-purification system. They had surprised and killed one asutra riding the neck of his gray host, but had encountered no others; in a dozen areas they had blocked off asutra passages. Etzwane, now with nothing better to do, made a slow

exploration of the ship, trying to learn the location of the asutra refuge. In this work he was assisted by the Alula, who had gained a measure of confidence.

For hours the group studied the ship, estimating distances and volumes, and finally concluded that the private refuge of the asutra lay directly under the control dome, in a space about ten feet square and four feet high. Etzwane and Karazan examined the outside of this space and wondered if they could break in. The walls showed no seams and were formed of a material unknown to Etzwane: neither glass nor metal. The space, Etzwane theorized, constituted the private quarters of the asutra and he wondered how long they could survive without nourishment — though of course there might be nutriment within the space.

Dawn approached. Durdane was a great black-purple disk surrounded by stars, with a pulsing magenta flare in the east. Blue Etta swung over the horizon; then came pink Sassetta and finally white Zael, and the face of Durdane awoke to the light.

The ship hung above Caraz, at a distance which Etzwane estimated to be about two hundred miles. Below would be Shagfe village, too inconsequential to be noticed. From south to north extended the

Caraz rivers, enormous silver-purple snakes languid on crumpled plush. In the far southwest was Lake Nior and a line of smaller lakes. Etzwane speculated as to the force which held the depot ship in place and how long it might take to fall to the surface if the asutra cut off the power. Etzwane winced, imagining the last few seconds... Still, the asutra had nothing to gain by destroying their ship. Etzwane reflected upon the curious similarities among creatures as disparate as man, asutra, Roguskhoi and Ka. All needed sustenance and shelter; all used light to locate themselves spatially... To communicate all used sound, rather than light or touch or odor, for simple and universal reasons. Sound pervaded and filled an area; sound could be produced with minimal energy; sound was infinitely flexible. Telepathy? A faculty unevenly useful to a man, but perhaps employed more consistently by other species; indeed, to regard a faculty so basic as restricted to the human race would be irrational. The study and comparison of intelligent life forms must be a fascinating endeavor, thought Etzwane... He scanned the sky in all directions, which was dead black and blazing with stars. Much too early to expect Ifness and an Earth ship. But not too early to fear the coming of an asutra vessel. The depot ship itself was a squat

cylinder, studded at twenty-foot intervals with thick cones ending in white-metal radiants. The skin, Etzwane noted, was not the copper of the ships he had previously seen, but a burnished gray-black, on which shone oily lusters of crimson, dark blue and green. Etzwane went once more to study the controls. No doubt but what these were in principle similar to the controls of an Earth ship, and he suspected that Ifness, had he been allowed the opportunity, might have puzzled out the functions of the odd little fingers and knobs and tanks of gray jelly...Karazan appeared from below. Claustrophobia had made him edgy and irritable; only in the observation dome, with unobstructed space surrounding him, could he relax. "I cannot relax at all. Our knives and tools are unequal to the task, and I cannot understand the asutra tools."

"I don't see how they can menace us," Etzwane reflected, "provided that all the passages are blocked. If they became desperate, they could possibly burn their way out and attack us with their guns...If they would lower us to the ground, they could go their way, in spite of Ifness' yearning for a spaceship, which he can procure at some other time."

"I agree, in every respect," said Karazan. "I dislike this hanging in

midair like a bird in a cage. If we could make the creatures understand us, no doubt an accommodation could be arranged. Why not try once more with the toad-men? We have nothing better to do."

They went down to the slave hold, where the toad-men crouched in apathy. Etzwane led one of them to the observation dome and, by dint of gestures toward the controls and down at the surface, indicated that the creature should lower the vessel to the ground, but to no avail; the gray thing stood staring in all directions, the palps raising and lowering at its breathing orifices, in evidence of some unknowable emotion.

Etzwane went so far as to push the creature toward the controls; it became rigid and exuded a foul-smelling slime from glands down its dorsal ridge. Etzwane desisted from his efforts.

After a half hour of cogitation he went to the blocked-off asutra passage and cautiously removed the sacks of cereal cake which blocked the aperture. He hissed and whistled, in as conciliatory a manner as he could contrive, then listened. No sound, no response. He tried again, and waited. Again without success. Etzwane closed off the hole once more, irritated and disappointed. The asutra, with intelligence at least equivalent to the human, ought to have

recognized that Etzwane was offering a truce.

Etzwane went to look down at Durdane, now fully exposed to the sunlight. Lake Nior had become obscured under a swirl of cirrus; the ground directly below was likewise hidden...The asutra's refusal to respond suggested an inability to compromise or cooperate. The creature seemed to expect no quarter and assuredly would give none. Etzwane remembered the Roguskhoi and the horrors they had worked upon the folk of Shant. According to previous assumptions, the Roguskhoi had been an experimental weapon designed for use against the Earth-worlds, but now it seemed likely that the asutra had the folk of the black globe ships in mind...Etzwane scowled down at Durdane. A situation which became ever more mysterious and contradictory. He mustered in his mind those questions which at one time or another had caused him perplexity. Why did the asutra trouble with human slaves when the Ka were equally deft, strong and agile? Why had the Ka destroyed Hozman's asutra with such passion? How could the asutra hope to match the Roguskhoi against a technically proficient race? And another matter: when the Ka had been trapped in the wrecked spaceship, why had not the asutra escaped as it easily could

have done? Curious matters! which might or might not at some time be illuminated.

The day dragged past. The men ate rations of the dried meat they had carried with them and cautiously sampled the asutra cereal cake, which proved bland but not unpleasant. The sooner Ifness arrived with a rescue ship the better. Ifness would come, of this Etzwane felt certain. Ifness had never failed in any undertaking; Ifness was too proud a man to tolerate failure...Etzwane went down to the slave hold and looked along the pale, still faces. He found Rune the Willow Wand and stood for several minutes examining the even features. He touched her neck, feeling for a pulse, confused by the throbbing heart. It would be possible to ride the plains of Canaan with Rune. Slowly, reluctantly, he turned away. He wandered around the ship, marveling at the precise workmanship and the expert engineering. What a miracle was a spaceship, which effortlessly could take thinking creatures such vast distances!

Etzwane went back to the dome and gazed in helpless fascination at the controls...The suns sank; night concealed the world below.

Night passed; day came, to reveal Hozman Sore-throat sprawled face-down at the back of

the slave racks, a cord tight around his neck and his tongue lolling forth. Karazan muttered in disapproval but made no effort to discover the murderers; Hozman's death seemed almost trivial.

The day proceeded. A mood of doubt and uncertainty infected the ship. The zest of victory was gone; the Alula were dispirited...Once more Etzwane whistled down the passage for the asutra, with no more success than before. He began to wonder if all the asutra were dead. He had seen one enter the passage, but subsequently an asutra riding on the neck of a toad-thing had been killed; it might have been the same asutra.

The day passed; then another and another. Durdane daily showed a different pattern of clouds; otherwise the scene was static. Etzwane assured the Alula that the very lack of event was a good omen, but Karazan retorted, "I cannot follow your reasoning. Suppose Ifness were killed on his way to Shillinsk? What if he were unable to communicate with his colleagues? Or assume that they refused to listen to him. What then? Our wait here would feel the same as it does now, and would represent no omen whatever."

Etzwane tried to explain Ifness' peculiar and perverse personality. "He is a man who cannot tolerate defeat."

"Still, he is a man, and nothing is certain."

At this moment a cry came from the lookouts, who stood night and day in the observation dome. "A spacecraft moves through the sky!"

Etzwane jumped up, heart in his mouth. The time was too early, far too early, to expect Ifness. He peered through the dome, to where the lookout pointed...High above, a bronze disk ship slid lazily across the sky, the suns' light reflecting from its skin.

"It is an asutra ship," said Etzwane.

Karazan said, somewhat heavily, "We have only one option, and that is to fight. Surprise is once again our ally, for they cannot expect to find the ship in enemy hands."

Etzwane glanced at the console. Lights blinked and flickered, signifying what, he did not know. If the disk ship were attempting to communicate and raised no response, they would approach with caution. Surprise was not so great an ally as Karazan had hoped.

The disk curved north, sank at a slant and halted, to hang quietly a mile away. Then it flickered suddenly green and disappeared. The sky was empty.

From a dozen throats came the hiss of released breath. "Now why is that?" Karazan demanded of the company in general. "I am not the

man for this sort of business; I detest puzzlement."

Etwane shook his head. "I can only say that I prefer the ship's absence to its company."

"It realizes our presence and plans to catch us napping," Karazan grumbled. "We will be ready."

For the rest of the day all hands crowded the observation dome, save those sent forth to patrol the ship. The bronze disk did not reappear, and presently the group relaxed, and conditions were as before.

Four days dragged past. The Alula lapsed into surly taciturnity, and the patrols began to lack crispness. Etwane complained to Karazan, who gave back an inarticulate mutter.

"If discipline deteriorates, we're in trouble," Etwane observed. "We must maintain morale. After all, everybody understood the circumstances before they left Durdane."

Karazan made no reply, but a short time later he called his men together and issued a set of instructions. "We are Alula," he said. "We are famed for our fortitude. We must demonstrate this quality now. After all, we are suffering nothing more serious than boredom and cramped quarters. The situation might be worse."

The Alula listened in somber

silence and subsequently went about their routines with greater alertness.

Late in the afternoon an event occurred which drastically altered the situation. Etwane, looking east over the great mulberry-gray expanse, noticed a black sphere hanging motionless in the sky, at a distance impossible to estimate. Etwane watched for ten minutes while the black globe hung motionless. On sudden thought he looked down to the control panel, to notice lights blinking and altering color. Karazan asked in a wistful voice, "Could it be the Earth ship, to carry us down to the soil?"

"Not yet. Ifness said two weeks at the earliest; the time is too soon."

"Then what ship floats yonder? Another asutra ship?"

"I told you of the battle at Thrie Orgai," said Etwane. "I would suppose this to be a ship of the asutra's enemies, the people of mystery."

"As the ship is approaching," Karazan noted, "the mystery is about to be elucidated."

The black ship curved down at a slant, passing a mile south of the depot; it slowed and drifted to a halt. At precisely the point where it had disappeared, the bronze-copper disk ship materialized with venomous stealth. For an instant it

lay quiescent, then spurted forth a pair of projectiles. The black globe, as if by nervous reflex, discharged countermissiles; midway between the ships a soundless dazzle blotted out the sky. Etzwane and Karazan would have been blinded, except for the stuff of the dome which resisted the surge of light.

The bronze disk had focused four jets of energy on the black globe, which glowed red and burned open: apparently its protective system had failed. In retaliation it projected a gush of purple flame, which for an instant flared over the disk ship like the blast of a torch; then the flame flickered and died. The black globe rolled over like a dead fish. The disk fired another projectile; it struck into the hold burnt by the converging beams. The globe exploded, and Etzwane received an instantaneous image of black fragments flying away from a core of lambent material; among the stuff he thought to glimpse hurtling corpses, grotesquely sprawled and rotating. Fragments struck the depot ship, clanging, jarring, sending vibrations through the hull.

The sky was again clear and open. Of the black globe, not an element remained; the bronze disk had disappeared.

Etzwane said in a hollow voice, "The disk ship lies in ambush. The

depot is bait. The asutra know we are here; they believe us to be their enemies, and they wait for our ships to arrive."

Etzwane and Karazan searched the sky with a new anxiety. The simple rescue of four girls from Hozman Sore-throat had expanded into a situation far past all their imaginings. Etzwane had not bargained for participation in a space war; Karazan and the Alula had not comprehended the psychological pressures which would be put upon them.

The sky remained clear of traffic; the suns sank at the back of a million magenta cloud feathers. Night was instant; dusk showed only as a sad subtle bloom.

During the night, the patrols were relaxed, to Etzwane's displeasure. He complained to Karazan, pointing out that conditions remained as before, but Karazan reacted with an irritable sweep of his great arm, consigning Etzwane and his peevish little fears to oblivion. Karazan and the Alula had become demoralized, Etzwane angrily told himself, to such an extent that they would have welcomed attack, captivity, slavery, anything which might have provided them with a palpable antagonist. Pointless to harangue them; they no longer listened.

Night passed, and the day and other nights and days. The Alula

sat huddled in the observation dome; they stared out at the sky, seeing nothing. The time had arrived when Ifness might be expected; but no one any longer believed in Ifness nor the Earth ship; the only reality was the sky cage and the empty panorama.

Etwane had considered a dozen systems for warning Ifness, should he indeed arrive, and had rejected them all, or, more properly, none were in any degree workable. Presently Etwane himself lost count of the days. The presence of the other men had long since grown odious, but apathy was a stronger force than hostility, and the men suffered each other in a silent community of detestation.

Then the quality of the waiting changed and became a sense of imminence. The men muttered uneasily and watched from the observation dome, the whites of their eyes showing. Everyone knew that something was about to occur, and soon, and this was the case. The bronze disk ship reappeared.

The men aboard the depot gave soft guttural groans of despair; Etwane made a last wild inspection of the sky. Where was Ifness?

The sky was vacant except for the bronze disk ship. It eased in a circle around the depot, then halted and slowly approached. It loomed enormous, blotting out the sky. The

hulls touched; the depot jerked and quivered. From the location of the entry port came a throbbing sound. Karazan looked at Etwane. "They are coming aboard. You have your energy weapon; will you fight?"

Etwane gave his head a dreary shake. "Dead we are no use to anyone, least of all ourselves."

Karazan sneered. "So it is to be surrender? They will take us away and make us their slaves."

"This is the prospect," said Etwane. "It is better than death. Our hope is that the Earth-worlds at last know the situation and will intervene on our behalf."

Karazan gave a jeering laugh and clenched his great fists, but still stood indecisive. From below came the sounds of ingress. Karazan told his warriors: "Make no resistance. Our force falls short of our desires. We must suffer the penalties of weakness."

Into the dome ran two black Ka, each with an asutra clamped to the nape of its neck. They ignored the men except to shoulder them aside and moved to the controls. One worked the curious little studs with ease and certainty. Deep within the ship an engine whined. The view outside the dome grew dim, then dark; nothing could be seen. Another Ka came to the entrance of the dome. It made gestures, indicating that the Alula and Etwane were to leave. Sullenly

Karazan hunched to the exit and bending his neck marched down the ramp toward the slave hold. Etzwane followed, and the others came behind.

Chapter 8

The Alula squatted in the aisles between the slave racks. The Ka ignored them as they moved about their tasks, asutra clamped to their necks like koalas on a branch.

The depot ship was in motion. The men felt no vibration, no lunge or surge, but the knowledge was sure, as if the shifting infrasubstance rasped upon a sensitive area of the brain. The men huddled silently, each thinking his own sullen thoughts. The Ka paid them no heed.

Time passed, at a pace impossible to measure. Where uncertainty and taut nerves had previously drawn out the hours, now a dismal melancholy worked to the same effect.

Etzwane's single hope was that Ifness had not been killed on the Plain of Blue Flowers and that vanity would impel him to their assistance. The Alula knew no hope whatever and were apathetic. Etzwane looked across the chamber to the niche where lay Rune the Willow Wand. He could see the outline of her temple and cheekbone and he felt a sudden warmth.

To seem gallant in her sight, he had risked and lost his freedom. Such would be Ifness' insulting opinion. Was it justified? Etzwane heaved a sad sigh. His motives had been complex; he did not know them himself.

Karazan heaved himself to his feet. He stood motionless for ten seconds, then stretched out his great arms, twisted them this way and that, making the muscles writhe. Etzwane became alarmed; Karazan's face was peculiarly calm and intent. The Alula watched, interested but indifferent. Etzwane jumped up, called out sharply. Karazan gave no signal that he had heard. Etzwane shook his shoulder; Karazan slowly turned his head; Etzwane saw no expression in the wide gray eyes.

The other Alula rose to their feet. One muttered to Etzwane, "Stand back. He is in death-seek."

Another said, "It is dangerous to molest folk in this condition; after all, his way may be the best."

"Not. so!" cried Etzwane. "Dead folk are no good to anyone. Karazan!" He shook the massive shoulders. "Listen! Do you hear me? If you ever want to see Lake Nior again, listen!"

He thought that a flicker of response appeared in Karazan's eyes. "We are not without hope! Ifness is alive; he will find us."

One of the other Alula asked

anxiously, "Do you really believe this?"

"If you knew Ifness, you would never doubt it! The man cannot tolerate defeat."

"This may be," said the Alula, "but how does this avail when we are lost upon a far star?"

From Karazan's throat came a hoarse sound then words: "How can he find us?"

"I don't know," Etzwane admitted, "but I will never lose hope."

Karazan said in a throbbing voice, "It is foolish to speak of hope. In vain did you draw me back."

"If you are a brave man, you will hope," said Etzwane. "'Death-seek' is the easy way."

Karazan made no reply. Once more he seated himself, then stretching out full-length he slept. The other Alula muttered together, turning cool glances toward Etzwane, as if his interference with Karazan's 'death-seek' were not to their liking...Etzwane went to his accustomed place and presently fell asleep.

The Alula had become unfriendly. Pointedly they ignored Etzwane and pitched their voices so that he could not hear. Karazan did not share the hostility, but sat off by himself, twirling a weighted thong around his finger.

The next time Etzwane slept, he

awoke suddenly to find three Alula standing over him: Black Hulanik, Fairo the Handsome, Ganim Thornbranch. Ganim Thornbranch carried a length of cord. Etzwane sat up, energy gun ready to hand. He remembered Hozman Sorethroat and his lolling tongue. The Alula, blank-faced, moved off across the room.

Etzwane reflected a few moments, then went to Karazan. "Some of your men were about to kill me."

Karazan nodded ponderously. "What is the reason for this?"

It seemed that Karazan might make no response. Then, with something of an effort, he said, "There is no particular reason. They want to kill someone and have selected you. It is a game of sorts."

"I don't care to join," Etzwane declared in a brassy voice. "They can play with someone from their own group. Order them to let me be."

Karazan shrugged lethargically. "It makes little difference."

"Not to you. To me it makes a great deal of difference."

Karazan shrugged again.

Etzwane went off to consider the situation. So long as he remained awake, he would live. When he slept, he would die — perhaps not the first, nor even the second time. They would play with him, try to break his nerve. Why?

No reason. A game, the malicious sport of a barbarian tribe. Cruelty? Etzwane was the outsider, a non-Alula with no more status than a chumpa captured for the baiting.

Several recourses suggested themselves. He could shoot his tormentors and abate the nuisance once and for all. A solution not wholly satisfactory. Even if the asutra failed to confiscate the gun, the game would continue in a more vicious form, with everyone waiting until he slept. The best defense was offense, thought Etzwane. He rose to his feet and crossed the chamber as if on his way to the latrine. His eyes fell on the still form of Rune the Willow Wand; she seemed less appealing than before; she was, after all, an Alul barbarian, no better than her fellows...Etzwane turned aside to the room containing the bags of meal cake and the water tanks. In the doorway he halted to inspect the group. They looked back askance. Smiling grimly, Etzwane brought forward a case of food and seated himself. The Alula watched with alert but expressionless faces. Etzwane once more rose to his feet. He took a wafer of the meal cake and a mug of water. Reseating himself, he ate and drank. He noticed several of the Alula licking their lips. As if by common impulse, all turned away and somewhat ostentatiously gave themselves to slumber.

Karazan looked on soberly, his noble forehead creased in a frown. Etzwane ignored him. What if Karazan wanted food and drink? Etzwane had come to no firm decision. He would probably provide Karazan his sustenance.

Upon consideration he moved back into the shadows, where he was less vulnerable to a thrown knife: the obvious response of the Alula. Presently, dissatisfied with his arrangements, he stacked several boxes of meal to provide a barricade behind which he could see but not be seen.

He began to feel drowsy. His eyelids sagged...He awoke with a start to notice one of the Alula sidling close.

"Two more steps and you're a dead man," said Etzwane.

The Alula stopped short. "Why should you deny me water? I took no part in the baiting."

"You did nothing to control the three who did. Starve and thirst in their company — until they are dead."

"This is not fair! You do not reckon with our customs."

"To the contrary. It is now I who do the baiting. When Fairo the Handsome, Ganim Thornbranch and Black Hulanik are dead, you shall drink."

The thirsty Alula turned slowly away. Karazan intoned: "It is an ill thing which has occurred."

"You might have stopped it," said Etzwane. "You chose to do nothing."

Rising to his feet Karazan glared into the provisions locker; for a moment he seemed the Karazan of old. Then his shoulders slumped. He said, "This is true. I gave no instructions; why worry about one death when all are doomed?"

"I happen to worry about my death," said Etzwane. "And now I am doing the baiting, and the victims are Fairo, Ganim, Hulanik."

Karazan looked toward the three named men; every eye in the room followed his gaze. The three men made defiant grimaces and glared about them.

Karazan spoke in a conciliatory voice: "Let us put aside this business; it is unnecessary and unreasonable."

"Why did you not say this while I was being baited?" demanded Etzwane in a fury. "When the three are dead, you will eat and drink."

Karazan settled once more in his previous position. Time passed. At first there was an ostentatious show of solidarity with the three, then other groups formed, talking in whispers. The three huddled back between the racks, and their glass knives glittered from the shadows.

Etzwane dozed once more. He

awoke, intensely aware of danger. The chamber was still. Etzwane rose to his knees and backed further into the shadows. Across the outer chamber the Alula were watching. Someone had reached the wall and now sidled inch by inch toward the provision locker, out of Etzwane's range of vision. Who?

Karazan no longer sat by the wall.

A paralyzing roar; a vast shape filled the aperture. Etzwane pulled the trigger, more by startlement than design. He saw a star-shaped dazzle as the flame struck into a great face. The lunging man was instantly dead. He tottered into the wall and fell over backward.

Etzwane came slowly out into the room, which was hushed in horror. He stood looking down at the corpse, wondering what Karazan had intended, for Karazan carried no weapon. He had known Karazan as a large-souled man; simple, direct and benevolent. Karazan deserved better than his cramped, despairing fate. He looked along the silent white faces. "The responsibility is yours. You tolerated malice and now you have lost the great leader."

Among the Alula there was a furtive shifting of position, a secret interchange of glances. Change came so quickly as to numb the mind: from dazed torpor to wild

screaming activity. Etzwane stumbled back against the wall. Alula leapt through the air; there was slashing and hacking and the doing of grisly deeds; and in a moment all was finished. On the deck Fairo, Ganim Thornbranch, Black Hulanik wallowed in their own blood, and two other men as well.

Etzwane said "Quick, before the asutra arrive. Drag the bodies into the racks. Find room on the shelves."

Dead bodies lay beside living. Etzwane broke open a sack of meal and blotted up the blood. In five minutes the slave hold was orderly and calm, if somewhat less crowded than before. Three minutes later three Ka with asutra peering from the napes of their necks passed through the hold, but did not pause.

The Alula, with hunger and thirst sated and with emotions spent, fell into a state of inertness, more stupor than sleep. Etzwane, though distrustful of the unpredictable Alul temperament, decided that vigilance would only foster a new hostility and gave himself up to sleep, though first taking the precaution of tying the energy gun to a loop of his pouch.

He slept undisturbed. When at last he awoke, he realized that the ship was at rest.

Chapter 9

The air in the hold seemed stale; the bluish illumination had dimmed and was more depressing than ever. From overhead came the thud of footsteps and fluctuating snatches of nasal Ka warbling. Etzwane rose to his feet and went to the ramp to listen. The Alula also rose and stood looking uncertainly toward the ramp: a far cry from the swaggering warriors Etzwane had met an aeon before at a bend of the Vurush River.

A grinding hiss, a chatter of ratchets: a section of wall drew back; a wash of gray light flooded the hold, to drown the blue glow.

Etzwane pushed past the Alula, where he could look out the opening. He leaned back in dismay and shock, unable to find meaning in the welter of strange shape and color. He looked once more through narrowed eyes, matching the pattern-forming capabilities of his mind against the alien stuff, and aspects of the landscape shifted into mental focus. He saw steep-sided sugarloaf hills overgrown with a lustrous black, dark-green and brown pelt of vegetation. Beyond and above spread a heavy gray overcast, under which hung pillows of black cloud and a few veils of rain. Along the lower slopes straggled lines of irregular structures, built from

rough lumps of an oyster-white material. At ground level the structures formed a denser complex. Most were built of the pallid lumps; a few seemed monolithic forms of black scoriaceous slag. Passages wound between and around, slanting and curving, without apparent purpose. Certain of these were smooth and wide and carried vehicles: cagelike drays; wagons, resembling beetles with raised wings; smaller lizardlike vehicles, darting inches above the surface. At intervals posts held up enormous black rectangles, lacking marks or discernible purpose. Etzwane wondered whether the eyes of Ka and asutra distinguished colors invisible to himself. The immediate foreground was a flat paved area surrounded by a fence of woven bronze. Etzwane, who by instinct observed and interpreted colors automatically, after the symbology of Shant, noted no purposeful use of color. Somewhere in the confusion of size, form and proportion, he thought, symbology must exist; technical civilization was impossible without control over abstractions.

The inhabitants of the place were Ka, at least half of whom carried asutra on their necks. No gray toad-men were in evidence, nor were human beings to be seen.

Except one. Into the slave hold climbed a person tall and spare, in

a shapeless coarse-fibered cloak. Stiff gray hair lay piled above the seamed gray face like a forkful of hay; the chin was long and without hair. Etzwane saw that the person was a woman, though her aspect and conduct were asexual. She called in a loud windy voice: "The persons now awake: follow me to the ground! Smartly now, quick and easy. This the first thing to know; never wait for two commands." The woman spoke a dialect barely comprehensible; she seemed as bitter and wild and grim as a winter storm. She set off down the ramp. Etzwane gingerly followed, glad to win free from the detested slave hold and its nightmare memories.

The group descended to the paved area under the great black depot ship. On a walkway above stood four Ka, looming like dark statues, with asutra at their necks. The woman led them into the mouth of a fenced run. "Wait here; I go to wake the sleepers."

An hour passed. The men stood hunched against the fence, glum and silent. Etzwane, clinging to his Ifness-inspired shred of faith, was able to take a melancholy interest in the surroundings. The passage of time made the circumstances no less strange. From various directions came the muffled Ka fluting, mingled with the hiss of traffic on the road immediately across the

fence. Etzwane watched the eight-wheeled segmented drays roll past. Who guided them? He could see no cab or compartment other than a small cupola at the front and within a small dark mass: asutra...From the depot ship marched the woman, followed by dazed folk who had occupied the shelves. They stumbled and limped and looked here and there in sad amazement. Etzwane noted Srenka and presently Gulshe; the erstwhile bravos hunched along as miserably as the others. Gulshe's gaze passed across Etzwane's face; he gave no signal of recognition. At the end of the procession came Rune the Willow Wand, and she as well looked past Etzwane without interest.

"Halt!" cried the lead woman in her great coarse voice. "Here we wait for the omnibus. Now let me speak to you. Your old life is gone and irretrievably; this is the world Kahei, and you are like fresh-born babes and another life ahead. It is not too bad unless they take you for testing, and then it is death. Still, who lives forever? In the meanwhile, you will never hunger or thirst or lack shelter, and life is tolerable, The men and agile women will be trained to fight in the war, and it is pointless to claim no part in the quarrel or think to avoid battle against men like yourselves; this is the fact and you must do the requirement.

"Waste nothing on grief; it is the easy way and the futile way. Should you wish to breed, make application to one or another intercessor, and a suitable partner will be assigned.

"Insubordination, lagging and loitering, fighting and mischievousness, are forbidden; penalties are not graduated, but in all cases absolute. The omnibus is here. Climb up the ramp and step to the forward end."

Crowded on the omnibus, Etzwane could see little of the passing countryside. The road led parallel to the hills for a space, then swung off across a plain. Occasionally a cluster of lumpy gray towers stood against the sky; a velvety growth of moss, dark red, dark green or violet-black, covered the ground.

The omnibus halted; the slaves filed out upon a concrete compound, surrounded on three sides by structures of oyster-white lumps. To the north rolled low hills, commanded by a landmark crag of rotten basalt. To the east spread a vast black quagmire, disappearing at the horizon into the gloom on the sky. Nearby, at the edge of the compound, rested a bronze disk ship, all ports open and ramps down upon the concrete. Etzwane thought to recognize the ship as that which had evacuated the

Roguskhoi chieftains from the Engh Valley in Palasedra.

The slaves were herded to a barracks. Along the way they passed a set of long narrow pens, exhaling a vile stench. In some of the pens wandered andromorphs of several freakish varieties. Etzwane noticed a dozen Roguskhoi. Another group verged toward the Ka. In one open pen huddled half a dozen spindly creatures with Ka torsos and grotesque simulations of the human head. Behind the pens ran a long low shed: the laboratory, so Etzwane realized, where these biological anomalies were created. After years of speculation he had learned the source of the Roguskhoi.

The captives were separated men from women, then divided into platoons of eight persons. To each platoon was assigned a corporal drawn from a cadre of the captives already on the scene. To Etzwane's group came an old man, thin, gaunt, seamed as the bark of an old tree, but nonetheless muscular and incessantly active, all elbows and sharp knees.

"My name is Polovits," declared the old man. "The first lesson you must learn, and learn well, is obedience, quick and absolute, because no second chance is offered. The masters are decisive. They do not punish, they destroy. A

war is in progress: they fight a strong enemy and have no inclination toward clemency. I remind you once more: to every instruction give smart and scrupulous obedience, or you will not live to receive another order. In the next few days you will see my statements exemplified. There is generally a depletion of one third in the first month; if you value life, obey all orders without hesitation.

"The rules of the cantonment are not complicated. You may not fight. I will adjudicate quarrels, and my judgment is final. You may not sing, shout or whistle. You may not indulge your sexual desires without prior arrangement. You must be tidy; disorder is not tolerated. There are two principal roads to advancement. First, zeal. A dedicated man will become a corporal. Second, communication. If you learn the Great Song, you will gain valuable privileges, for very few persons can sing with the Ka. It is difficult, as those who try will discover, but fighting in the first rank is worse."

Etzwane said, "I have a question. Who must we fight?"

"Ask no idle questions," snapped Polovits. "It is a useless habit, and shows instability. Look at me! I have asked never a question, and I have survived on Kahei for long years. I was taken from Shauzade District as a child

during the second slavings. I saw the Red Warriors created, and it was a hard time. How many of us survive now? I could count their names in a trice. Why did we survive?" Polovits peered from face to face. "Why did we want to survive?" Polovits own face showed a haggard triumph. "Because we were men! Fate has given us the one life to live, and we use it to the best! I make the same recommendation to you: do your best! Nothing else is valid."

"You cautioned me in regard to idle questions," said Etzwane. "I ask a question which is not idle. Are we offered any inducement? Can we hope to see Durdane again as free men?"

Polovits' voice became hoarse. "Your inducement is persistence of life! And hope — what is hope? On Durdane there is no hope; death comes for all, and it comes here as well. And freedom? It is your option. Notice the hills; they are empty. The way is open; go now and be free! No one will halt you. But before you go, take heed! The only food is weed and wort; the only water is mist. You will bloat on the herbs; you will call in vain for water. Freedom is yours."

Etzwane asked nothing more. Polovits pulled the cloak around his thin shoulders. "We will now eat. Then we will commence our training."

To eat, the squad stood up to a long trough containing lukewarm mush, stalks of crisp cold vegetable and spiced pellets. After the meal Polovits put the men through calisthenics, then took them to one of the low lizardlike vehicles.

"We have been assigned the function of 'stealthy attack.' These are the strike cars. They move on vibrating pads and are capable of high speed. Each man of the squad will be assigned his car, and he must maintain it with care. It is a dangerous and valuable weapon."

"I wish to ask a question," said Etzwane, "but I am not sure whether you will consider it 'idle.' I do not want to be struck dead for simple curiosity."

Polovits put a stony gaze upon him. "Curiosity is a futile habit."

Etzwane held his tongue. Polovits nodded curtly and turned to the lizard car. "The driver lies flat, with arms ahead. He looks down into a prism which shows him an adequate field of view. With arms and legs he controls the motion; with his chin he discharges either his torpedoes or his fire stab."

Polovits demonstrated the controls, then took the squad to a set of mock-ups. For three hours the group trained at the simulated controls; there was then a rest break, then a two-hour demonstration of maintenance techniques,

which each man would be required to use on his vehicle.

The sky darkened; with twilight came a fine rain. In the dismal gray gloom the squad marched to the barracks. For supper the trough held a bland sweet soup which the men dipped up with mugs. Polovits then said, "Who among you wishes to learn the Great Song?"

Etwane asked, "What is involved?"

Polovits decided that the question was legitimate. "The Great Song recounts the history of Kahei, through symbolic sounds and sequences. The Ka communicate by singing themes of allusion, and you must do the same, through the medium of a double flute. The language is logical, flexible and expressive, but difficult to learn."

"I wish to learn the Great Song," said Etwane.

Polovits showed him a harsh grin. "I thought you would decide as much." And Etwane decided that he did not like Polovits. The need for dissembling therefore increased; he must truckle and submit; he must throw himself into the program with apparent zeal.

Polovits seemed to perceive the flow of Etwane's thoughts and made a cryptic observation: "In either case, I will be satisfied."

For a period existence went quietly. The sun — or suns — never

appeared; the dank gloom oppressed the spirits and made for dreariness and lethargy. The daily routine included calisthenics, periods of training in the lizard cars, work sessions which might consist of food preparation, sorting of ores, or shaping and polishing of swamp wood. Neatness was emphasized. Detachments policed the barracks and groomed the landscape. Etwane wondered whether the insistence upon order reflected the will of asutra or the Ka. Probably the Ka, he decided; it was unlikely that the asutra altered the personality of the Ka any more than they had affected Sajarano of Sershan, or Jurjin, or Jerd Finnerack, or Hozman Sore-throat. The asutra dictated policy and monitored conduct; otherwise it seemed to remain aloof from the life of its host.

Asutra were everywhere evident. Perhaps half the Ka carried asutra; mechanisms were guided by asutra, and Polovits spoke in awe of asutra-guided aircraft. The latter two functions seemed somewhat plebeian activity for the asutra, Etwane reflected, and would indicate that asutra, no less than Ka, men, ahulph and chumpa were divided into categories and castes.

At the end of the day, an hour was set aside for hygiene, sexual activity, which was permitted on the floor of a shed between the male

and female barracks, and general recreation. The evening rain, occurring soon after light left the sky, put a term to the period, and the slaves went to their barracks, where they slept on mounds of dried moss. As Polovits had asserted, no guards or fences restrained the slaves from flight into the hills. Etzwane learned that on rare occasions a slave did so choose to seek freedom. Sometimes the fugitive was never again seen; as often, he returned to camp after three or four days of hunger and thirst and thankfully resumed the routine. According to one rumor, Polovits himself had fled into the hills and upon his return had become the most diligent slave of the camp.

Etzwane saw two men killed. The first, a stout man, disliked calisthenics and thought to outwit his corporal. The second man was Srenka, who ran amok. In both cases a Ka destroyed the offender with a spurt of energy.

The Great Song of Kahei was for Etzwane a labor of love. The instructor was Kretzel, a squat old woman with a face concealed among a hundred folds and wrinkles. Her memory was prodigious; her disposition was easy, and she was always willing to entertain Etzwane with rumors and anecdotes. In her teaching, she used a mechanism which reproduced the

rasps, croaks and warbles of the Great Song in its classic form. Kretzel then duplicated the tones on a pair of double pipes and translated the significance into words. She made it clear that the Song was only incidentally music; that essentially it served as the basic semantic reference to Ka communication and conceptual thinking.

The Song consisted of fourteen thousand cantos, each a construction of thirty-nine to forty-seven phrases.

"What you will learn," said Kretzel, "is the simple First Style. The Second employs overtones, trills and echoes; the Third inverts harmony and for emphasis reverses phrases; the Fourth combines the Second with augmentations and variations; the Fifth suggests rather than propounds. I know only the First, and superficially at that. The Ka use abbreviations, idioms, allusions, double and triple themes. The language is subtle."

Kretzel was far less rigorous than Polovits. She told all she knew without restraint. Did the asutra use or understand the Song? Kretzel rocked her shoulders indifferently back and forth. "Why concern yourself? You will never address yourself to the things. But they know the Song. They know everything and have brought many changes to Kahei."

Encouraged by the woman's loquacity, Etzwane asked other questions. "How long have they been here? Where did they come from?"

"All this is made clear in the last seven hundred cantos, which report the tragedy which came to Kahei. This very land, the North Waste, has known many terrible battles. But now, we must work or the Ka will presume sloth."

Etzwane made himself a set of double pipes, and as soon as he had subdued his aversion for the Ka musical intervals, which he found unnatural and discordant, he played the first canto of the Great Song with a skill to amaze the old woman. "Your dexterity is remarkable. Still, you must play accurately. Yes, my old ears are keen! Your tendency is to ornament and warp the phrases into the ways you know. Absolutely wrong! The Great Song becomes gibberish."

Sexual activity among the slaves was encouraged, but couples were not allowed to form permanent liaisons. Etzwane occasionally saw Rune the Willow Wand across the compound where the women performed their own exercises, and one day during the period of "free calisthenics" he took the trouble to approach her. She had lost something of her insouciance and nonchalant grace; she looked at

him now without cordiality, and Etzwane saw that she failed to recognize him.

"I am Gastel Etzwane," he told her. "Do you remember the camp by the Vurush River where I played music and you dared me to knock away your cap?"

Rune's face showed no change of expression. "What do you want?"

"Sexual activity is not forbidden. If you are so inclined, I will apply to the corporal and specifically request that —"

She cut him short with a gesture. "I am not so inclined. Do you think I care to bear a child on this dreary gray hell? Go spend yourself on one of the old women and bring no more blighted souls to life."

Etzwane expostulated, citing one principle, then another, but Rune's face became progressively harder. At last she turned and walked away. Etzwane somewhat wistfully returned to his calisthenics.

The days dragged by with a slowness Etzwane found maddening. He estimated their duration to be four or five hours longer than the days of Shant: a situation which upset his natural rhythms and made him alternately morose and nervously irritable. He learned the first twelve cantos of the Song, both the melodies and the associated

significances. He began to practice basic communication, selecting and joining musical phrases. His dexterity was counterbalanced by an almost uncontrollable tendency to play notes and phrases as personal music, slurring here, extending there, inserting grace notes and trills, until old Kretzel threw up her hands in exasperation. "The sequence goes thus and so," and she demonstrated. "No more, no less! It conveys the idea of a vain search for crayfish along the shore of the Ocean Quagmire during the morning rain. You introduce random elements of other cantos to create a mishmash, a farrago of ideas. Each note must be just so, neither under-nor over-blown! Otherwise you sing absurdities!"

Etzwane controlled his fingers and played the themes precisely as Kretzel had indicated. "Good!" she declared. "Now, we proceed to the next canto, where proto-Ka, the Hiana, cross the mud flats and are annoyed by chirping insects."

Etzwane much preferred Kretzel's company to the peevish admonitions of Polovits, and he would have spent all his waking hours practicing the Great Song had she allowed. "Such diligence is wasted," said Kretzel. "I know the cantos; I can sing to the black ones in faltering First Style. This is all I can teach you. If you lived a

hundred years, you might begin to play Second Style, but never could you know the feeling, for you are not a Ka. Then there are Third, Fourth and Fifth, and then the idioms and cursive forms, converging and diverging harmonics, the antichords, the stops, the hisses and slurs. Life is too short; why exert yourself?"

Etzwane decided, nonetheless, to learn as best he could; he had nothing better to do with his time. Every day he found Polovits more detestable, and his only escape was to Kretzel. Or freedom in the hills. According to Polovits, the wilderness afforded neither food nor water, and Kretzel corroborated as much. His best hope of evading Polovits lay in the Great Song... What of Ifness? The name seldom occurred to Etzwane. His old life was vague; by the day it dwindled and lost detail. Reality was Kahei; here alone was life. Sooner or later Ifness would appear; sooner or later there would be a rescue — so Etzwane told himself, but every day the idea became more and more abstract.

One afternoon Kretzel became bored with the Song. Complaining of cankerous gums, she threw the pipes to a shelf. "Let them kill me; what difference does it make? I am too old to fight; I know the Song and so they stay my death, and I do

not care; my bones will never know the soil of Durdane. You are young; you have hopes. One by one they will go, and nothing will be left but the bare fact of life. Then you will discover the transcendent value of life alone... We have been through much hardship; we have known cruel times. When I was young, they bred their copper warriors and trained them to spawn in human women, for what purpose I never knew."

Etwane said, "I know well enough. The Roguskhoi were sent to Durdane. They devastated Shant and several great districts of Căraz. Is it not strange? They destroy the folk of Durdane, and at the same time capture them to use as slave warriors against their enemy."

"It is only another experiment," said Kretzel wisely. "The Red Warriors failed, now they try a new weapon for their war." She peered over her shoulder. "Take your pipes and play the Song. Polovits watches for slackness. Take heed of Polovits; he likes to kill." She reached for her own pipes. "Ah, my poor tortured gums! This is the nineteenth canto. The Sah and Aianu use raho fibers to wind rope and dig coral nut with blackwood sticks. You will hear both the schemes for 'blackwood' and for rough wood employed in a rude scratching action, and that is general usage. But you must

carefully play the little finger flutter, else the scheme is 'visiting a place where the quagmire may be distantly seen' from Canto 9635."

Etwane played the pipes, watching Polovits from the corner of his eye. Polovits paused to listen, then turned Etwane a flinty glance and continued on his way.

Later in the day, during calisthenics, Polovits suddenly exploded into fury: "Crisply then! Do you detest exertion so much that you cannot put your hand to the ground? Never fear, I am watching, and your life is as fragile as a moth shell. Why do you stand like a post?"

"I await new orders, Corporal Polovits."

"Your kind is the most venomous, always with a glib retort just short of insolence! Don't indulge in dreams of glory, my Song-playing virtuoso, you won't evade the worst of it! I assure you of this! So now: a hundred high leaps, for your health's sake; let them be agile, with a fine twinkling of the heels!"

In calmness and gravity Etwane obeyed as best he could. Polovits watched with grim intentness but could find no fault with the efforts. At last he turned and strode away. With a faint smile on his face, Etwane returned to Kretzel's little office and practiced the nineteen cantos he already

knew and learned the melody to Cantos Twenty and Twenty-one from the reproducing machine. He would discover the semantic significance in due course.

Etwane conducted himself with care, but Polovits was unrelenting. Etwane's patience wore thin, and he decided to take positive action. Polovits, by some uncanny means, divined the fact of the decision and thrust his angular old face close to Etwane's. "A dozen men have thought to best me, and can you guess where they lie at this moment? In the great hole. I know tricks you never heard of! I'm just waiting for a single insubordinate move, then you will learn the folly of proud attitudes on this sad world Kahei."

Etwane had no choice but hypocrisy. He said politely, "I'm sorry if I have given offense; I want only to remain inconspicuous. Needless to say, I am not here by my own choice."

"You waste my time with your witticisms," bawled Polovits. "I intend to hear no more!" He strode away, and Etwane went to practice the Song.

Kretzel inquired as to his lack of zest, and Etwane explained that Polovits was about to take his life. Kretzel gave a whinny of shrill laughter. "That spleenful little dingbat; he's not worth the rumble

of an ahulph's gut! He won't give you to death, because he's afraid to speak a lie. Do you think the Ka are fools? Come, I will teach you Canto 2023, wherein the stave cutters kill a stone roller because he dented their moss. Then you need only play the eleventh phrase should Polovits so much as raise a finger. Better! Tell old Polovits that you are rehearsing the Canto of Open Inspection and that you consider his conduct slack. To work. Polovits is no more consequence than a bad smell."

"Gastel Etwane," said Polovits during the morning calisthenics. "You 'move with the grace and agility of a pregnant grampus. I cannot accept those knee bends as accomplished facts. Has your well-known musical virtuosity rendered you absent-minded? Well, then, answer! I count your silence an insolence. How long must I suffer your slights?"

"Not long at all," said Etwane, "Yonder walks a Monitor; summon him. By chance, I have here my pipes, and I will play the call for an Open Inspection, and we shall have justice."

Polovits' eyes seemed to burn red. His mouth slowly opened, then snapped shut. He swung around and made as if to summon the Ka. As if by great effort, he restrained himself. "So, then, he takes you

and half this band of club-footed cretins to the hole; how do I gain? I only must start again with a group as bad. We are wasting time! Back to the calisthenics; once again the knee bends. Smartly now!" But Polovits spoke somewhat pensively and refused to meet Etzwane's gaze.

Kretzel asked Etzwane, "How is Polovits now?"

"He is a changed man," said Etzwane. "His tirades have ended, and likewise his tantrums; he is now as meek as a grass tit, and the drills are almost a pleasure."

Kretzel was silent and Etzwane once again took up the pipes. He noticed a tear rolling down the brown folds of Kretzel's cheek and lowered the pipes. "Has something occurred to distress you?"

Kretzel rubbed at her face. "I never think of home; I would long since have been dead had I mourned. But one word stirred a memory and brought it to life, and I thought of the meadows above the Elshuka Pond where my family held a steading. The grass was high, and when I was a little girl, I worked long burrows through the grass and surprised two tits at their nesting...One day I burrowed a long tunnel through the grass. When it broke open I looked up into the face of Molsk the Man-taker. He took me away in a

sack, and I never again saw the Elshuka Pond...I have no great time to live. They will mix my bones into this sour black soil, when I would once again be home in the sunlight."

Etzwane blew a pensive tune on the pipes. "Were many slaves on Kahei when you came?"

"We were among the first. They used us to build their Roguskhoi. I evaded the worst of it when I learned the Song. But the others are gone, save a few. Old Polovits, for one."

"Has no one escaped?"

"Escaped? To where? The world is a prison!"

"I could take pleasure in doing general harm, if I were able."

Kretzel gave an indifferent shrug. "Once I felt the same way, but now — I have played the Great Song too many times. I feel almost a Ka."

Etzwane recalled the occasion at Shagfe when the Ka captive had destroyed Hozman Sore-throat's asutra. What had triggered this spasm of violence? If all the Ka of Kahei could feel the same impulse, there would be no more asutra. Etzwane became conscious of how little he in fact knew of the Ka, of their way of life, their innate character. He put questions to Kretzel, who at once became cross and advised that he apply himself to the Great Song.

Etwane said, "I know twenty-two cantos; there are more than fourteen thousand yet to be learned; I will be an old man before my questions are answered."

"And I will be dead," snapped Kretzel. "So then, attend to the mechanism; hear the double quaver at the end of the second phrase. This is a common device and signifies what is called 'vehement assertion.' The Ka are brave and desperate people; their history is a series of tragic plights, and the double quaver expresses this mood, the challenge flung into the face of destiny."

Polovits, the furious old fighting cock, with startling abruptness had become a surly introvert who gave minimum effort to the drills. The tension created by his old antagonism had collapsed; the drills became periods of droning boredom.

The mood, for Etwane, infected every aspect of existence; he began to feel a disassociation, a sense of existence on two levels, inner and outer; and his mind, retreating into a subjective middle distance, watched the work of his body without interest or participation.

What of the Great Song? Each day Etwane dutifully went to Kretzel. He played the cantos and memorized the significances, but

the project began to loom vast and futile. He could learn the fourteen thousand cantos and so become another Kretzel...Etwane became wrathful, outraged by his own passivity. "I defeated the Roguskhoi! I used my energy and intellect! I refused to submit! I must use these same resources to enforce my terms upon destiny!"

So he told himself and, spiritually regenerated, plotted revolt, sabotage, a guerrilla operation, kidnap and holding of hostages, the capture of the bronze disk ship beside the compound, signals and communications...Each of his schemes foundered on the same reef: impracticality. In frustration he thought to organize a team of kindred spirits, but encountered a discouraging lack of zest. Except in one person, a gaunt and brooding man from the Saprovno District who used the name Shapan, from a weed with tenacious tendrils and fishhook barbs. Shapan seemed interested in Etwane's views, and Etwane began to feel that he had encountered an ally until one day Kretzel casually identified him as the most notorious provocator of the camp. "He's been the death of a dozen men. He urges them into illicit conduct, then notifies the Ka, and to what purpose other than sheer perversity, I cannot fathom, for he has profited not a whit."

Etwane became first furious, then disgusted with himself, then sardonically apathetic. Shapan seemed eager to formulate new plots, but Etwane feigned perplexity.

A clanging of gongs awoke the slaves while darkness still pressed dank and heavy upon the camp. There were flutings and the thud of running feet; an emergency of some sort was afoot. From the lumpy cupola atop the garage sounded a wild ululation: the general alarm. The slaves ran forth to find a transport ship at rest in the exercise yard. The slaves stood back, murmuring doubts and speculations.

From the ship came a dozen Ka, asutra clutching their necks. Etwane sensed haste in their conduct. Ka song-speech, in the "referential" First Style, fluted across the compound. Again the ululating alarm sounded; the corporals ran forth and ordered their platoons; those who had trained with weapons were marched to the transport ship and up into a long dim hold. The deck was dirty and layered with filth; the air carried an abominable stench. The slaves stood crowded together, one man's chin on another man's shoulder, and the odor of sweating bodies added a sweet-sour overtone to the reek.

The hulk lurched and moved; the slaves held to stanchions or braced against the hull, or each other; there was no room to fall. Some became sick and commenced a lugubrious groaning; a few began to yell in anger and panic, but were silenced by blows. The cries were muffled; the groaning gradually subsided.

An hour the ship moved, or perhaps two, then jarred to the ground. The engines died; the ship was at rest. With open air so near at hand the slaves became desperate and began to pound on the hull, and to shout. "Out, out, out..."

The hatch opened, admitting a gust of cold wind. The slaves cringed back involuntarily. A voice called, "March ahead, toward the light. Stay in line; do not straggle to either side."

The miserable men stirred; without any particular volition they found themselves trudging along a soft, somewhat spongy surface toward the light. The wind blew steadily, driving a thin cold rain. Etwane felt like a man in a terrifying dream, from which he knew he must awake.

The column came to halt before a low structure. After a wait of a minute or two, it continued forward, down a ramp, into an underground hall, dimly illuminated. Drenched and shivering, the slave warriors stood pressed to-

gether, vapor rising fetid from their garments. At the far end sounded the fluting of a Ka; the creature mounted a bench where he was joined by an old man.

The Ka produced a set of First Style flutings; the old man spoke, his mouth a black gap at the back of his whiskers. "I give you the meanings. The enemy has come in a spaceship. They have put down their forts: once again they intend to sweep across Kahei. All the wise helpers they will kill." He paused to listen to the Ka, and Etzwane wondered who were the "wise helpers." Asutra? The old man spoke again. "The Ka will fight, and you will fight with the Ka, who are your dominants. So you will go forth to perform your destiny, and your deeds will be joined to the Song."

The old man listened, but the Ka had no more to say, and the old man spoke alone. "Look about you now, into each other's faces because grim events are in the offing and many a man will never see another day. Those who die, how will they be remembered? Not in name nor in semblance, but by their desperate courage. A canto will tell how they went forth in lizard cars and slid across the dark dawn to measure themselves against the enemy."

Again the Ka fluted; the old man listened and translated. "The

tactics are simple. In the lizard cars you are nameless destroyers, the simple essence of desperate rage. Let them fear you! What remains to you except ferocity? When you go, go only forward! The enemy holds the north moor; his forts control the sky. We strike from the ground —"

Etzwane cried out from the dark, "Who is this 'enemy'? They are men like ourselves! Should men kill men in aid of the asutra?"

The old man craned his neck. The Ka fluted; the old man played phrases on his double pipes, then called to the warriors, "I know nothing, so ask no questions. The enemy is the enemy, no matter what his guise. Go forth, destroy! These are the words of the Ka. My own words are these: good luck to all of you. It is an ill business to die so far from Durdane, but die we must, and why not gallantly?"

Another voice, hoarse and mocking, called out, "Gallantly indeed we will die, and you can assure the Ka of so much; they have not brought us this far for nothing."

A light flashed red at the end of the chamber. "Follow the light; step forward then!"

Men milled and circled, none willing to be first. The Ka fluted; the old man cried, "Out into the passage; go where the red lamp beckons!"

The men surged into a white-washed tunnel and through a narrow portal at the end; here each man was gripped between two Ka while a third stuck a tube into his mouth and forced a gout of acrid liquid down his throat.

Coughing, cursing, spitting, the men stumbled out upon a pavement and into the watery gray light of dawn. To either side lizard cars stood in ranks. The men came slowly forward, and their corporals reached forth and turned them aside, toward a lizard car. "In you go," Polovits told Etzwane in a toneless voice. "Drive north, over the rise. The torpedo tubes are armed; torpedo the forts, destroy the enemy."

Etzwane slid into the car; the lid slammed down upon him. He touched the thrust pedal; the car rumbled and hissed and slid off across the pavement and out upon the moor.

Ingenious and dangerous were the lizard cars: not two feet high, supple and lithe to cling to the contours of the ground. Energy packs were carried in the tail; Etzwane knew nothing of the vehicle's range, but at the training camp they were refueled but seldom. Three torpedo tubes aimed directly forward; the dorsal surface supported a squat swivel-mounted energy gun. The cars slid on nodes of compression, and in favorable

circumstances moved with darting rapidity.

Etzwane drove north up a slope padded with black velvet moss. To either side slid other lizard cars, some ahead and some behind. The potion which had been forced down his throat now began to take effect: Etzwane felt a grim elation, a sensation of power and invulnerability.

He came up over the roll of the slope and retarded the speed lever. The control failed to answer. No matter, or so his drugged mind assured him; forward and full speed; what other speed or direction was necessary?...He had been tricked. The knowledge eroded his drug-induced elan. He felt sudden prickles of anger. Not enough that they send him forth against 'enemies' he had never known! They also must ensure that he go to his death in haste!

A wide valley spread before him. Two miles away he saw a small shallow lake, and nearby three black spaceships. Lake and spaceships were surrounded by a ring of twenty squat black cones: evidently the forts which the slave warriors had been commanded to attack.

Over the hill came the lizard cars, one hundred and forty in number, and none could be stopped. One of the cars in front of

Etwane swung about in a great semicircle and started back the way it had come, the man within waving, gesticulating, pointing. Etwane and his rancor needed no further stimulus; he turned his own car about and drove back toward the base, yelling in crazy glee out the ventilation ports. One by one the other cars became infected; they veered and darted back the way they had come. On the ridge above crouched four mobile forts, with observers within. These now slid forward, red lights flashing. Etwane brought his torpedo sight to bear. He nudged the trigger, and one of the forts spun up into the air like a fish breaking water to crash back down on its side. The other forts opened fire; three lizard cars became puddles of molten metal, but simultaneously the forts were struck and broken. From two of these clambered Ka to run across the moor with great striding leaps; after them slid the lizard cars, harrying, swerving, circling, and finally running down the Ka.

Etwane waved his arm and bawled out the ventilation ports: "To the base, to the base!"

Over the hill raced the lizard cars. Instantly the weapon emplacements beamed glaring red rays of warning. "Spread apart!" yelled Etwane. He signaled with his hands, but none heeded. He aimed his torpedo tube and fired;

one of the emplacements erupted. The remaining fortifications spat forth lances of energy, burning the lizard cars at a touch, but other torpedoes struck home. In five seconds half the lizard cars had become cinders, but the weapons were silenced, and the surviving lizard cars raced back to the base unopposed. Someone fired a torpedo into the subterranean garage and the entire hill exploded. Turf, concrete, dismembered torsos, miscellaneity spurted high in the air and settled.

The base was a silent crater. The problem now was halting the lizard cars. Etwane experimented with the various controls to no avail. He threw open the entry hatch to actuate a cut off switch. The motor died, the car slid to a halt. Etwane jumped out and stood on the black velvet moss. If he were to be killed in the next minute, he would have died exultant.

The other men halted their cars as Etwane had done and stepped to the ground. Of the hundred and forty who had set forth, half had returned. The drug still worked its effect; faces were flushed, with eyes prominent and brilliant, and each individual's personality seemed more concentrated, more distinct and powerful than before. They guffawed and stamped and recounted their exploits: "— outlaws

at last, with our lives not worth a twig —" "So, then, it's over the hills, into the far places! Let them follow if they dare!" "Food? Of course there's food! We'll rob the Ka!" "— vengeance! They won't accept our triumph; they'll drop down from the skies —"

Etzwane spoke: "A moment; listen to me! Over the hill are the black spaceships. The crews are men like ourselves from an unknown world. Why should we not go to greet them like friends and trust in their good will? We have nothing to lose."

A brawny black-bearded man known to Etzwane only as "Korba" demanded, "How do you know there are men aboard these ships?"

"I saw a similar ship broken up," said Etzwane. "The bodies of men were expelled. In any event, let us reconnoiter; we have nothing to lose."

"Correct," declared Korba. "We live now from minute to minute."

"One further matter," said Etzwane. "It is important that we act as a group, not as a gang of wild men. We need a leader to coordinate our actions. What of Korba here? Korba, will you undertake to be our leader?"

Korba pulled at his black beard. "No, not I. You asserted the need and you are the man for the job. What is your name then?"

"I am Gastel Etzwane. I will take the responsibility unless someone objects."

No one spoke.

"Very well," said Etzwane. "First, let us repair the cars so that we may manage them more easily."

"Do we need cars?" demanded a hot-eyed old man named Sul, who bore a reputation for disputatiousness. "Why not move on our own feet and go where the cars cannot go?"

"We may have to range far for food," said Etzwane. "We know nothing of the country; the waste may extend a thousand miles. In the cars we have a greater chance of survival, and, also, the cars are equipped with weapons. We are dangerous warriors in the cars; without them we are a gang of starving fugitives."

"Correct," said Korba. "If the worst occurs, as no doubt it will, we will make them remember us."

The engine panels were lifted and clamps were removed from the speed controls. Etzwane held up his hand. "Listen." Faintly from beyond the hill came a fluctuating wail, of a weird wild timbre to set the teeth on edge.

The men gave various opinions. "A signal!" "No signal; a warning!" "They know we are here; they are waiting for us." "It is a ghost sound; I have heard it near lonesome graves."

Etzwane said, "In any case we now set forth. I will lead. At the crest of the hill, we will halt." He climbed into his car, pulled down the hatch and set off; the cars slid over the velvet moss like a troop of great black rats.

The hill swelled above them, then flattened, and here the cars halted. The men alighted. Behind them the moor swept down to the crater of the destroyed base and the distant morass; ahead spread the valley, with the pond, the spaceships, and the forts surrounding. About the pond stood a group of twenty men, performing some sort of work. The distance was too great to pick out their features, or the nature of their business, but their motions conveyed a sense of urgency. Etzwane became uneasy; the air of the valley was heavy with imminence.

From the spaceships came another wailing call. The men at the pond jerked around, stood rigid a few seconds, then ran back to the ships.

On the hill Korba suddenly called out in awe; he pointed to the south where misty hills loomed up across the dark overcast. Sliding into view from behind these hills came three copper-bronze disk ships. The first two were of the ordinary sort; the third, an enormous construction, drifted up over the horizon like a copper

moon. The first two slid forward with menacing purpose; the large ship drifted more slowly, low to the ground. From the conical forts around the lake came chattering white bolts of light, all striking the leading disk ship. It gave off a blue coruscation, then bounded high into the sky and was lost to sight in an instant. The second disk ship stabbed a bar of purple energy at one of the black ships. The forts threw out new energy bolts, but the black ship glowed red, then white, and slumped into an irregular molten mass. The bronze disk then dropped quickly behind a rise of the moor, apparently undamaged. The large disk settled upon the surface nearby; its port snapped open, and ramps struck down to the moss. Out surged lizard cars — twenty, forty, sixty, a hundred. They slid off toward the forts, streaks of black over the black moss, almost invisible and offering no target. The forts moved back toward the globe ships, but the lizard cars darted down the black velvet hillside and into torpedo range. The forts discharged bolts of white force; lizard cars were shattered and flung high into the air. Others discharged torpedoes, and one after another the forts became fragments of torn metal. The lizard cars hurled torpedoes at the black globe ships, without effect; the impacts produced only

spatters of angry red light. The two bronze disk ships, the large and the small one, lifted into the air and both launched thick rods of purple incandescence toward the black globes. Overhead, assistance had arrived. Eight silver and white ships of complicated construction, long and slender, dropped down to hang over the black globes. The air flickered and vibrated; the purple bolts became a smoky amber-yellow; they dimmed and died as if the source of their power had failed. The black globes lifted into the air and sped off into the sky. They became dark spots on the gray clouds, then plunged through and were gone. The silver and white ships hung motionless for three minutes, then plunged away through the clouds.

The lizard cars slid back to the large disk ship. They mounted the ramps and disappeared within. Five minutes later both copper disk ships rose into the air and departed across the southern hills.

Except for the men on the moor, the panorama was empty of life. Beside the pond remained the exploded forts and the still-molten black ship.

The men entered the lizard cars and gingerly descended the slope to the pond. The forts were tangles of useless metal; the slumped black globe radiated so much heat that no approach could be made. There

would be no food taken from this hull. Water, however, was near at hand. They went down to the edge of the pond. An unpleasant odor arose, which became more intense as they approached. "Stink or not," said Korba, "I will drink; I have forgotten nicety." He bent to lift up a handful of water, then jerked back. "The water is full of swimming things."

Etwane leaned over the pond. The water swirled with the motion of numberless insectlike creatures, ranging in size from specks to things the length of his hand. From the pinkish-gray torsos grew six small legs, each ending in three tiny fingers. At one end black eye specks peered from hairy cavities. Etwane straightened up in disgust. He would drink none of this water. "Asutra," he said. "Asutra by the millions."

He looked around the sky. Black clouds swept low, trailing skeins of rain. Etwane shivered. "This is a dire place; the sooner we are gone the better."

One of the men said dubiously, "We will be leaving water and food."

"The asutra?" Etwane grimaced. "I'll never be so hungry. In any event, they are alien life-stuff and probably poisonous." He turned away. "The spaceships may be back; we had better be gone before that time."

"All very well," complained old Sul, "but where is our destination? We are doomed men; why make haste nowhere?"

"I can propose a destination. South beside the morass is the camp, the closest place for food and water."

The men squinted at him in doubt and puzzlement. Korba demanded somewhat truculently: "You want us to go back to the camp, when we are free at last?"

Another man grumbled, "First I'll eat asutra and drink their filth. I was born a Graythorn of the Bagot race, and we are not the sort to enslave ourselves for food."

"I said nothing of enslaving ourselves," said Etzwane. "Have you forgotten the weapons we carry? We do not go to eat slave food; we go to take what we want and to pay off some old debts. We follow the shore south, until we find the camp, then we shall see."

"It is a far way," muttered someone.

Etzwane said, "We came by transport ship in two hours. To return we will ride two days, or three, or four, but there is no help for it."

"Precisely right," Korba declared. "We may be killed by asutra lightning, but none of us expects long life!"

"Into your cars, then," said Etzwane. "We drive south."

They circled the pond and the smoldering globe ship, then drove up over the black moor where rows of glossy tracks indicated the way they had come. Down the long slope they slid, past the exploded base. Somewhere under the rubble, thought Etzwane, lay Polovits, his tyranny completed, his face pressed into the mold. Etzwane felt a grim compassion, in which was mingled outrage for the wrongs done to himself and the human folk. He looked back at the lizard cars; he and his fellows were as good as dead, but first they would harm their enemies.

The morass was close at hand: a limitless expanse of ooze, blotched with chalk-green scum. The cars swung south and proceeded along the edge of the moor. Clouds hung heavy and low; in the distance moor, morass and sky blurred together without discernible line of conjunction.

South slid the cars, a supple, sinister train, the men never looking back. During the afternoon they came to a slough of brackish dark water, of which they drank, despite a bitter aftertaste, and filled the receptacles within the cars; then, fording the slough at the very brink of the morass, they continued south.

The sky darkened; the evening rain fell, to be instantly absorbed by the moss. The cars proceeded

through the dusk, which presently became darkness. Etzwane brought the column to a halt, and the men climbed out upon the moss, groaning for their sore muscles and hunger. They stretched and hobbled back and forth along the line, muttering in gruff hoarse voices. Some, noting how distinct was the division between the luminous ooze of the morass and the dead blackness of the moor, wanted to drive on through the night. "The sooner we come to the camp the sooner we make an end to the matter; we will eat or be killed."

"I am also in haste," said Etzwane, "but the dark is too dangerous. We have no lights and cannot stay together. What if someone becomes torpid and goes to sleep? Hungry or not, we must wait for day."

"In the light we are visible to sky craft," argued one of the men. "There are dangers in both directions, but our bellies howl for food regardless."

"We'll start as soon as the dawn gives light," said Etzwane. "To travel through the black night is folly. My belly is as slack as anyone's; for the lack of anything better I plan to sleep." He troubled to talk no further, and went down to the shore to look out over the morass. The ooze glowed blue in lines and reticulations, these slowly moving and forming new patterns.

Flickers of pale light hung in the reeds and moved in wisps across the open spaces...At Etzwane's feet something scuttled across the mud; by its outline he saw it to be a large flat insect, walking on a dozen pads across the ooze. He peered close. An asutra? No, something different, but perhaps in just some similar swamp had the asutra evolved. Perhaps even on Kahei, though the first cantos of the Great Song made no reference to asutra...Others of the group walked by the shore, marveling at the lights and the eerie solitude...Along the shore someone struck a tiny fire, using dried bits of moss and reed for fuel. Etzwane saw that several men had captured insects and were preparing to toast and eat them. Etzwane gave a fatalistic shrug. He was leader by the most tenuous of contracts.

The night was long in passing. Etzwane tried to find room to sleep within the lizard car, then came forth and lay down upon the moss. A cold wind blew through the night, allowing him no real comfort. He dozed...Sounds of anguish awakened him. He rose to his feet and felt his way along the line of cars. Three men lay on the ground, retching convulsively. Etzwane stood a moment, then went back to his car. He could offer neither comfort nor help; indeed, so close about them hung doom

that the death of three men seemed of no great import...A misty rain slanted down on the wind. Etzwane once more entered the car. The groans of the poisoned men became less distinct and presently were no more heard.

Dawn finally arrived, and three men lay dead: the three men who had eaten insects. Without comment Etzwane went to his car, and the column proceeded south.

The moors seemed endless; the men drove the cars in a semitorpor. At noon they came upon another slough and drank of the water. The reeds surrounding carried clusters of waxy fruit, which one or two of the men gingerly examined. Etzwane said nothing, and the men turned reluctantly away.

Korba stood looking along the moors to the south. He pointed to a far shadow which might either be a cloud or a jutting mountain. "North of the camp rose a crag," said Korba, "perhaps that which lies ahead."

"We have further to go," said Etzwane. "The ship which took us north moved at a considerable speed. I suspect that two days of travel, or more, still lay ahead."

"If our bellies will give us the strength."

"Our bellies will take us there if the cars will do so. This is my main fear, that the cars will exhaust their energy."

Korba and the others looked askance at the long black shapes. "Let us move on," said one of the men. "At least we shall see the other side of the hills, and by luck Korba may have the accurate prediction."

"I hope so too," said Etzwane. "Still, be prepared for disappointment."

The column proceeded, across an undulating black carpet of moss. Nowhere was there evidence of life: no motion, no ruined dwelling, no ancient post or cairn.

A brief storm struck down upon them; black clouds boiled low; a sudden wind came roaring out of the west...In half an hour the storm had passed, leaving the air clearer than before. The shadow to the south was clearly a mountain of considerable mass.

Close upon the end of the day the column breasted the ridge to look out over the panorama. As far as the eye could reach appeared empty black moor.

The column halted; the men came forth from the cars to stare over the desolation ahead. Etzwane said briefly, "We have far to go." He re-entered his car and slid away downhill.

A project had formed in his mind, and when darkness forced a halt, he explained his plan. "Remember the disk ship which waits at the camp? I believe it to be

a space vessel; in any case, it is an object of great value, worth far more than the deaths of fifty or sixty men. If a ship is in fact still at the camp, I suggest that we capture it and bargain our way back to Durdane."

"Can we do this?" asked Korba. "Will they not detect us and use their torpedoes?"

"I noticed no great vigilance at the camp," said Etzwane. "Why should we not attempt the maximum? For a certainty no one will help us but ourselves."

One of the Alula said in a bitter voice, "I had forgotten; so many events have come and gone. Long ago you told us of the planet Earth and mentioned a certain Ifness."

"A fantasy," said Etzwane. "I too have forgotten...Strange to think! For the folk of Earth, did they know of us, we would be creatures of a nightmare, less than wisps of the swamp light yonder...I fear that I will never see Earth."

"I would be happy to see old Caraz," said the Alula. "I would think myself fortunate beyond belief and never grieve again."

One of the men growled, "I would be content for a chunk of fat meat."

One at a time, reluctant to leave the warmth of companionship, the men went off to their cars and passed another dreary night.

As soon as dawn made the land

distinct, they were under way. Etzwane's car seemed not as lively as before; he wondered how many miles remained in its engine. How far ahead lay the camp? One day at least, three or four days at most.

The moss stretched ahead flat and soggy, almost one with the quagmire. Several times the cars passed pools of gray mud. Near one of these the column halted to rest and ease cramped muscles. The pools quaked with huge miasmic bubbles, rising with an unctuous suck. The periphery of the mud was home to colonies of jointed brown worms and running black balls, both of which submerged themselves in the mud at a sound — a fact which puzzled Etzwane; there seemed no natural enemy from which the creatures would be required to protect themselves. Etzwane searched the air: no birds, flying reptiles, nor winged insects. In the fringe of rotten black moss three or four feet back from the shore of mud he spied small burrows, from which issued the prints of small three-fingered members. Etzwane examined the prints with frowning suspicion. In the moss a small purplish-black shape moved back into concealment: an asutra, not yet mature. Etzwane drew back, alarmed and repelled. When races derived from such disparate environments as man and asutra, could there

possibly be communication or sympathy? Etzwane thought not. A tolerance founded on mutual distaste, possibly; cooperation, never.

The column proceeded, and now one of the cars began to falter, rising and falling on its support nodes. The car at last sank down upon the moor and would go no further. Etzwane put the driver astride the most fresh-seeming car; once again the column proceeded.

During the middle afternoon, two other cars subsided upon the moss; it was plain that a very few hours remained to any of the engines. Ahead rose another black hill, which seemed lower than that hill north of camp. If it were another hill, Etzwane thought they would never see the camp, for none of the men had the capacity to walk thirty or forty or fifty miles.

They swung out close to the morass to avoid the heights; even so, the mountain met the morass in a precipitous bluff, over which they laboriously climbed.

Up toward the ridge moved the lizard cars, groaning and sagging. Etzwane led the way over the crest, the landscape to the south opened before them...The camp lay below, not five miles distant. A husky roar rose from fifty dry throats. "The camp; down to the camp! Food awaits us; bread, good soup!"

Etzwane tottered out of his car.

"Hold back, you fools! Have you forgotten our plan?"

"Why should we wait?" croaked Sul. "Look! There is no spaceship on the premises; it is gone! Even if there were, your scheme is absurd. We shall eat and drink; all else is now meaningless. On then, down to the camp!"

Etzwane said, "Hold back! We have suffered too much to throw away our lives now. There is no spaceship, true; regardless, we must make ourselves masters of the camp, and this means surprise. We will wait for dusk. You must control your appetite until then."

"I have not come all this distance to suffer further," declared Sul.

"Suffer or die," growled Korba. "When the camp is ours, then you shall eat. Now is the time to prove ourselves men, not slaves!"

Sul said no more. Ashen-faced, he leaned back against his car, mumbling through dry gray lips.

The camp seemed curiously listless and desolate. A few women moved about their duties; a Ka came briefly forth from the far barracks. It walked aimlessly back and forth, then re-entered. No squads drilled upon the compound; the garage was dark.

Korba whispered, "The camp is dead; there is no one to stop us."

"I am suspicious," said Etzwane. "The quiet is unnatural."

"You believe that they expect us?"

"I don't know what to believe. We still must wait till dusk, even if the camp is empty except for three Ka and a dozen old women, so that they can't send off a message of emergency."

Korba grunted.

"The sky is darkening already," said Etzwane. "In another hour the dusk will hide our approach."

The group waited, pointing here and there at remembered corners of the camp. Lamps began to glow, and Etzwane looked at Korba. "Are you ready?"

"I am ready."

"Remember, I will attack the Ka barracks from the side; you enter the camp from the front and destroy whatever resistance appears."

"The plan is clear."

Etzwane and half the cars descended the flank of the hill, dark cars invisible on the black moss. Korba waited five minutes, then proceeded down the slope, approaching the camp across the old training compound. Etzwane's group, with cars dragging and bumping across the moss, drove up to the back of the lumpy white structure which the Ka used as a barracks.

The men lunged inside and swarmed upon the seven Ka they found in the single chamber.

Astonished or perhaps apathetic, the Ka made only feeble resistance and were lashed immobile with thongs. The men, keyed up for a desperate battle and finding none, felt baffled and frustrated, and started to kick the Ka to death. Etzwane halted them in a fury. "What are you doing? They are victims like ourselves. Kill the asutra, but do no harm to the Ka! It is purposeless!"

The men thereupon plucked the asutra off the Ka's necks and ground them underfoot, to the horrified moaning of the Ka.

Etzwane went forth to find Korba, who had already sent his men into the garages, the commissary and the communication chamber, where they had discovered a total of four Ka, three of which they clubbed to pulp, lacking Etzwane's moderating presence. The men encountered no other opposition; they were masters of the camp, almost without effort. Reacting to the tension, many of the men became nauseated. Sagging to their knees, they gave themselves to an agonized, empty-stomached retching. Etzwane, himself hearing strange ringing sounds in his ears, ordered the women of the camp instantly to serve hot food and drink.

The men ate, slowly, gratefully, marveling that the storming of the camp had gone with such facility.

The situation was incredible.

After eating, Etzwane felt an overpowering drowsiness, to which which he must not allow himself to succumb. Old Kretzel stood nearby, and he called for her. "What has happened to the Ka? There were forty or fifty in the camp; now there are ten, or less."

Kretzel spoke in a dismal voice. "They departed in the ship. Only two days ago they went, in great excitement. Great events are in the offing, for better or worse."

"When will another ship return?"

"They did not trouble to explain this to me."

"Let us question the Ka."

They went to the barracks where the Ka lay bound. The ten men Etzwane had left on guard were all asleep, and the Ka were furiously working to liberate themselves. Etzwane roused the sleeping men with kicks. "Is this the way you guard our safety? Every one of you, dead to the world! In another minute you might have been dead forever."

Old Sul, one of the men who had been left on guard, gave a surly response: "You yourself described these men as victims; in all justice they should be grateful for their deliverance."

"This is precisely the point I intend to make to them," said Etzwane. "Meanwhile, we are only

the wild men who attacked them and tied them with thongs."

"Bah," muttered Sul. "I am unable to chop logic with you; you have the superior sleight with words."

Etzwane said, "Make sure the thongs are secure." He spoke to Kretzel. "Tell the Ka that we mean them no harm, that we regard the asutra as our mutual enemy."

Kretzel peered at Etzwane in perplexity, as if she found the remarks strange and foolish. "Why do you tell them that?"

"So that they will help us, or at least do nothing to hinder."

She shook her head. "I'll sing to them, but they will pay no great heed. You do not understand the Ka." She took up her double pipes and played phrases. The Ka listened without perceptible reaction. They made no reply, but after a brief silence they made wavering, tremulous sounds, like the chuckling of baby owls.

Etzwane looked at them doubtfully. "What do they say?"

Kretzel shrugged. "They talk together in the Allusive Style, which is beyond my capability. In any event, I don't think they understand you."

"Ask them when the ship will return."

Kretzel laughed but obliged him. The Ka looked at her blankly. One warbled a brief phrase; then

they were silent. Etzwane looked questioningly at Kretzel.

"They sing from Canto 5633, the 'embarrassing farce.' It might translate as a jeer: 'what interest can this matter have for you?'"

"I see," said Etzwane. "They are not practical."

"They are practical enough," said Kretzel. "The situation is beyond their understanding. Do you remember the ahulphs of Durdane?"

"I do indeed."

"To the Ka, men are like ahulphs: unpredictable, half intelligent, addicted to incomprehensible antics. They cannot take you seriously."

Etzwane grunted. "Ask the question again. Tell them that when the ship arrives they will be freed."

Kretzel played her flute. A terse answer returned. "The ship will be back in a few days with a new corps of slaves."

Chapter 10

The mutinous slaves had gained themselves food, shelter and a respite which all realized to be temporary. A certain Joro argued that the group should transport supplies to some secret place in the hills and hope to survive until they could dare another raid. "By this means we gain another several

months, and who knows what might happen? The rescue ships from Earth might arrive."

Etzwane gave a bitter laugh. "I know now what I should have known every moment of my life: that unless you help yourself, you die a slave. The fact is basic. No one is going to rescue us. If we remain here, the chances are good that we will shortly be killed. If we go out to hide upon the moors, we gain two months of wet clothes and misery, and then we will be killed anyway. If we pursue the original plan, at best we gain a great advantage, and at worst we die in dignity, doing our enemies as much damage as possible."

"The chances of 'best' are few, and of 'worst' many," grumbled Sul. "I, for one, am fatigued with these visionary schemes."

"You must do as you think best," said Etzwane politely. "By all means, go forth upon the moors. The way is open."

Korba said curtly, "Those who want to go, let them go now. The rest of us have work to do, and time may be short."

But neither Sul nor Joro chose to leave.

During the day Rune the Willow Wand approached Etzwane. "Do you remember me? I am the Alul girl who once befriended you. I wonder if you think warmly

of me now? But I am haggard and wrinkled, as if I were old. Is this not true?"

Etwane, preoccupied with a hundred anxieties, looked across the compound, trying to contrive a remark suitably noncommittal. He said, somewhat curtly, "On this world a pretty girl is a freak."

"Ah! I wish then I were a freak! So long ago, when the men reached to tweak off my little cap, I was happy, even though I pretended displeasure. But now, if I were to dance naked in the compound, who would look at me?"

"You would still attract attention," said Etwane. "Especially if you danced well."

"You mock me," said Rune sorrowfully. "Why cannot you offer me some consolation, a touch or a smiling glance? You make me feel squat and ugly."

"I have no such intention," said Etwane. "You may be assured of this. But please excuse me; I must see to our preparations."

Two days went past, with tension increasing every hour. On the morning of the third day a disk ship slid up the coast from the south and hovered over the camp. There was no need for alarms or exhortations; the men were already at their stations.

The ship hovered, hanging on a humming web of vibration. Etwane, in the garage, watched with

clammy sweat on his body, wondering which of many circumstances would go wrong.

From the ship came a mellow hooting sound, which after an interval reverberated back from the hill.

The sound died, the ship hovered. Etwane held his breath until his lungs ached.

The ship moved and slowly descended to the landing field. Etwane exhaled and leaned forward. This now was the time of crisis.

The ship touched the ground, which visibly subsided under the mass of the ship. A minute passed, two minutes. Etwane wondered if those aboard had perceived an incorrectness, the absence of some formality...The port opened; a ramp slid to the soil. Down came two Ka, asutra riding their necks like small black jockeys. They halted at the base of the ramp, looked across the compound. Two more Ka descended the ramp, and the four stood as if waiting.

A pair of drays set out from the warehouse: the usual procedure when a ship landed. They swerved to pass close to the ramp. Etwane and three men came forth from the garage, to walk with simulated purposelessness toward the ship. From other areas of the yard other small groups of men converged upon the ship.

The first dray halted; four men stepped down and suddenly leapt upon the Ka. From the second dray four other men brought thongs; there would be only needful killing, lest they be left with a ship and none to navigate. While the group struggled at the foot of the ramp, Etzwane and his men ran up the ramp and into the ship.

The ship carried a crew of fourteen Ka and several dozens of asutra, some in trays like that which Etzwane and Ifness had found in the wreck under Thrie Orgai. Except for the scuffle at the foot of the ramp neither Ka nor asutra offered resistance. The Ka had seemed paralyzed by surprise, or perhaps apathetic; there was no comprehending their emotions. The asutra were as opaque as flint. Again the rebel slaves felt the frustration of overexertion, of striking out with all force, and encountering only air. They felt relieved but cheated, triumphant yet seething with unrelieved tension.

The great central hold contained almost four hundred men and women. These were of all ages and conditions, but in general they seemed of poor quality, spiritless and defeated.

Etzwane wasted no time upon the folk in the hold; he gathered the Ka and their asutra in the control

dome and brought up Kretzel. "Tell them this," said Etzwane, "And make sure that they comprehend exactly. We want to return to Durdane. This is what we require of them: transportation to our home world. We will tolerate nothing less. Tell them that when we arrive at our destination, then we will make no further demands upon them; they may have their lives and their ship. If they refuse to take us to Durdane, we will destroy them without mercy."

Kretzel frowned and licked her lips, then brought forth her pipes and played Etzwane's message.

The Ka stood unresponsive. Etzwane asked anxiously, "Do they understand?"

"They understand," said Kretzel. "They have already decided what their answer will be. This is a ceremonial silence."

One of the Ka addressed Kretzel in a set of careful First Style tones, delivered in a manner so offhand as to seem condescending or even derisive.

Kretzel said to Etzwane, "They will take you to Durdane. The ship departs at once."

"Ask if sufficient food and drink are aboard."

Kretzel obeyed and elicited a reply. "He says that provisions are naturally adequate for the journey."

"Tell them one thing further.

We have brought torpedoes aboard the ship. If they try to deceive us, we will all blow up together."

Kretzel played her double pipes; the Ka turned away without interest.

Etwane had known many triumphs and joys during the course of his life, but never exhilaration such as now on this journey back from the dark world Kahei. He felt tired, but he could not sleep. He distrusted the Ka; he feared the asutra; he could not believe that his victory was final. Of the other men he felt confidence only in Korba and made certain that he and Korba never slept at the same time. To maintain a spirit of vigilance, he warned that the asutra were devious, that they did not readily accept defeat; privately he was sure that victory had been won. In his experience the asutra were impassive realists, unaffected by consideration of malice or revenge. When the Roguskhoi had been defeated in Shant, the asutra might easily have destroyed Garwi and Brassei and Maschein with their energy bolts, but had not troubled to do so. Chances were good, thought Etwane, that the impossible had been accomplished, and without the assistance of the ineffable Ifness, which added savor to the triumph.

Etwane spent considerable time in the control dome. Through the ports nothing could be seen but

dead blackness and an occasional streaming filament of spume. A panel depicted the outside sky; the stars were black disks on the luminous green field. A target circle enclosed three black dots which daily grew larger; Etwane assumed these to be Etta, Sassetta and Zael.

Conditions in the hold were appalling. The cargo of men and women were ignorant of cleanliness, order or sanitation; the hold stank like an abattoir. Etwane learned that most of the folk had been born on Kahei and had known only the life of the slave camp. During the evolution of the Roguskhoi, macabre experiments had been part of their everyday routine; it had seemed the natural way of life. The asutra, whatever their virtues, displayed neither squeamishness nor pity, thought Etwane, and perhaps these were emotions idiosyncratically human. Etwane tried to feel compassion for the slave folk, but the stench and disorder in the hold made the task difficult. Once more on Durdane, these folk were destined for further misery. Some might wish themselves "back home" on the black world Kahei.

The ship coasted through open space. Above danced the three suns; below spread the gray-violet face of Durdane. As the ship descended, familiar contours

passed below: the Beljamar and the Fortunate Isles, Shant and Palasedra, then the vast world-continent Caraz.

Etwane identified the river Keba and Lake Nior. As the ship dropped lower, the Thrie Orgai and the river Vurush appeared. With Kretzel's assistance he directed the ship down to Shagfe. The ship landed on the slope south of the village. The ramps descended; the passengers tumbled, staggered and crawled out upon the soil of their home world, each clutching a parcel of food and as much good metal as he could carry: enough to assure a comfortable competence on metal-poor Durdane. Etwane provided himself with thirty rods of glistening red alloy from the engine room: enough wealth, so he calculated, to bring him once again to Shant.

Ever distrustful, Etwane insisted that the Ka come forth from the ship and remain until the folk had dispersed. "You have brought us here to Durdane, and now we are finished with you and your ship, but are you finished with us? I don't want to be destroyed by a purple lightning-bolt that you discharge as soon as you have the capability."

Through Kretzel, the Ka responded, "We don't care whether you live or die; leave the ship at once."

Etwane said, "Either come out on the plain with us, or we will remove your asutra, which you seem to revere so much. We have not suffered and hoped and striven to take foolish chances at the last moment."

Eight of the Ka at last went out on the plain. Etwane, with a group of his men, led them a mile up the slope, then dismissed them. They trudged back to their ship while Etwane and his companions sought shelter among the rocks. As soon as the eight were aboard, the ship lifted into the air. Etwane watched it dwindle and vanish, then within himself the knowledge came: he had really returned to Durdane. His knees felt limp; he sat down upon a rock, weary as he had never been before in his life, and tears flowed from his eyes.

Chapter 11

In Shagfe the advent of so many persons laden with wealth had created dislocations. Some drank copiously of Baba's cellar-brew, others gambled with the Kash Blue-worms who still haunted the vicinity. Throughout the night sounds of altercation could be heard: yells and curses, drunken sobs and cries of pain, and in the morning a dozen corpses were discovered. As soon as light came to the sky, groups set forth for their

ancestral lands, to north, east, south and west. The Alula, uttering no words of farewell to Etzwane, departed for Lake Nior. Rune the Willow Wand turned a single glance over her shoulder. Etzwane, meeting the gaze, found it unreadable. He watched them recede into the morning haze; then he went to find Baba the innkeeper.

"I have two matters to take up with you," said Etzwane. "First, where is Fabrache?"

Baba replied in vague terms. "Who is to trace the course of that loose-footed man? The slave trade is ruined. Old markets are gone, and Hozman Sore-throat has disappeared; poverty stalks the land. As for Fabrache, when he appears you will see him; he is not a man for predictability."

"I will not wait," said Etzwane, "which leads me to the second matter: my pacer. I desire that it be saddled and made ready for travel."

Baba's eyes protruded in wonder. "Your pacer? What prodigy of imagination is this? You own no pacer at my stables."

"But indeed I do," said Etzwane in a sharp voice. "My friend Ifness and I both left our pacers in your care. I at least, now, intend to resume possession."

Baba shook his head in wonder and raised his eyes piously to the sky. "In your own land odd

customs may prevail, but here at Shagfe we are more practical. A gift once given may not be recalled."

"Gift, you say?" Etzwane's tone was grim. "Have you heard the tales told by the folk who brought you metal for cellar-brew last night? How by our strength and will we won our way home to Caraz? Do you think that I am the kind of man to tolerate petty thievery? Bring me my pacer, or prepare for a remarkable thrashing."

Babe reached behind his bar and brought forth his cudgel. "A beating, is it? Listen to me, my cockscomb, I have not been Shagfe innkeeper without dealing a few beatings of my own, I assure you. Now leave these premises on the instant!"

From his pouch Etzwane brought the little weapon Ifness had given him so long ago: the energy gun he had carried to Kahei and back and never had used. He pointed the gun at Baba's strongbox and touched the button. A flare, an explosion, a scream of horror, as Baba stared at the devastation which only a moment before had held a fortune in metal. Etzwane reached out, took his cudgel and hit him across the back. "My pacer, and in haste."

Baba's fat face was lambent with fear and malice. "Already you have done me out of a lifetime's

earnings! Do you wish the fruits of all my toil?"

"Never try to cheat an honest man," said Etzwane. "Another thief might sympathize with your goals; as for me, I want only my property."

In a voice nasal with rage Baba sent one of the yard boys to the stables. Etzwane went out into the inn yard, where he found old Kretzel sitting on a bench. "What do you do here?" asked Etzwane. "I thought that you would be on your way to Elshuka Pond."

"The way is long," said Kretzel, pulling the tattered cloak about her shoulders. "I have a few bits of metal, enough to keep food in my mouth for a period. When the metal is gone, I shall start my journey south, though surely I will never arrive at the grass meadows above the pond. And if I did, who would remember the little girl who was stolen by Molsk?"

"What of the Great Song? How many people of Shagfe will understand when you play your pipes?"

Kretzel huddled her old shoulders into the sunlight's warmth. "It is a great epic: the history of a far world. Perhaps I will forget, but perhaps not, and sometimes when I sit here in the sun, I will play the pipes, but no one will know the great deeds I relate."

The pacer was led forth: a creature by no means as sound as that Etzwane had brought to Shagfe, with gear somewhat worn and makeshift. Etzwane pointed out these facts, and the boy brought him out sacks of meal and a bladder of cellar-brew for the journey.

Standing by the side of the inn, Etzwane saw a familiar face: it belonged to Gulshe, who watched his preparations with a lowering intensity. Gulshe would make an efficient guide, reflected Etzwane, but what of the times when Etzwane slept and Gulshe kept watch? The prospect caused Etzwane to shudder. He gave Gulshe a polite salute and mounted his pacer. For a moment he looked down upon old Kretzel, her head stored with wonderful knowledge. He never would see her again, and with her would die the history of a world...Kretzel looked up; their gazes met. Etzwane turned away, his eyes again full of tears. He departed Shagfe, and against his back he felt Gulshe's stare and Kretzel's farewell.

Four days later Etzwane rode over a jutting sandstone crest and looked down on the flowing Keba. Shillinsk, by his rough reckoning, should lie somewhat south, for he had lost his way crossing the Plain of Blue Flowers. He looked up the Keba shore and five miles south

spied the Shillinsk dock. He turned the pacer down the slope.

The Shillinsk inn was as he had remembered it. Neither cargo vessel nor barge was moored alongside the dock, but Etzwane felt no great impatience; the tranquillity of Shillinsk was a thing to be enjoyed in itself.

He entered the inn to find the landlord polishing the surface of his counter with a bag of rottenstone and a greasy square of chumpa skin. He failed to recognize Etzwane, for which Etzwane felt no surprise. In his ragged garments he was a far remove from that spruce Gastel Etzwane who had come to Shillinsk with Ifness.

"You will not remember me," said Etzwane, "but some months ago I came here with the sorcerer Ifness, in his magic boat. You were the victim of an unpleasant incident, as I recall."

The landlord grimaced. "Do not bring such matters to my attention. The sorcerer Ifness is a man to be feared. When will he come for his boat? It floats yonder on the water."

Etzwane stared in surprise. "Ifness has not taken his boat?"

"Look through the doorway; you will see it, exactly as you left it." And he added virtuously, "I have kept the craft secure and unmolested, as I was charged."

"Well done." Etzwane was greatly pleased; he had watched Ifness at the controls; he knew the use of the dials and also knew how to board the boat without suffering an electric shock. He indicated the pacer. "For your trouble I hereby make you the gift of yonder pacer, with his saddle. I require only a meal and lodging for the night; tomorrow I sail away in the magic boat."

"You will take it to Ifness?"

"In all truth, I can't imagine what has happened to him. I expected that he would have come to Shillinsk long ago and taken the boat himself...No doubt, if he requires either me or the boat he will know where to find me — if he is still alive."

If Ifness were still alive. Between Shagfe and Shillinsk lay a hundred dangers: chumpa, bands of crazy ahulph, robber tribes and slavers. Ifness might have fallen victim to any of these dangers, with all of Etzwane's hard thoughts unjustified...Should he go forth to seek Ifness? Etzwane heaved a long sigh. Caraz was vast. It would be an exercise in futility.

The landlord prepared a savory supper of river fish poached in a tart green sauce, and Etzwane walked out on the dock to watch purple dusk fall over the water. Shant and the city Garwi were much closer than he had hoped.

In the morning he rowed out to the boat in a skiff and gingerly prodded the guard switch with a dry stick. Then even more gingerly he laid his finger on the gunwale. No shock, no coruscation of sparks like that which had flung the landlord into the river.

Etwane tied the skiff to the mooring line and cast off. The current caught the boat and carried it north and out into the stream. He hoisted the sail; Shillinsk receded and became a line of toy houses on the shore.

Now: the critical experiment. He opened the console and examined the line of knobs. Cautiously he twisted the "Ascensor." Up rose the boat, gliding on the wind. Etwane hurriedly lowered the sail lest a gust capsize him.

He tested the other knobs; the boat swung in a wide arc and flew east toward Shant.

Below passed the dove-gray plains and dark green swamps. Ahead glistened the Bobol River, and then the great Usak.

By night Etwane reached the east coast and the Green Ocean. A few flickering yellow lights indicated a shoreside village; ahead the stars reflected on the water.

Etwane decelerated the boat so that it drifted slowly, and slept; and when dawn came the land of Shant

loomed along the horizon to the southeast.

Etwane flew high above cantons Gitanesq and Fenesq, then descended toward the Sualle. The towers of Garwi could barely be seen, a handful of glowing jewels, in the south. The shores closed in; fishing boats worked in the distance. Etwane dropped the boat into the water. He hoisted the sail and with the wind at his back drove with a bubbling wake toward Garwi.

The wind presently slackened, and the boat moved more slowly over the placid water. Drowsing in the warmth, Etwane could find no occasion for haste; indeed, the prospect of docking the boat and stepping ashore aroused him a curious mood of melancholy. The adventure would then be definitely finished; for all its misery and black despair, he had lived to his utmost capacity; he had augmented and enriched his life.

Across the halcyon water sailed the boat, and the towers of Garwi reared above him like lords at a banquet. Along the shore Etwane spied familiar sights: this building, that warehouse, and there: the ramshackle old dock at which Ifness had moored his boat. Etwane swung the tiller; the boat gurgled through the water. Etwane dropped the sail; the boat coasted quietly to the pier.

Etwane made the boat secure, then walked up into the road and hailed a diligence. The driver looked him over with misgivings. "Well, then, why do you stop me? I have nothing to give; go to the public hospital for your alms."

"I want no alms; I want transportation," said Etwane. He climbed into the diligence. "Take me to Fontenay's Inn, on Galias Avenue."

"You have money?"

"Not in these garments. At Fontenay's you will be paid; accept my word for this."

The driver flicked the pacer into motion. Etwane called up to him, "What has been happening in Garwi? I have been away for months."

"Nothing of any great moment. The Green and Purple have weighed us down with taxes; they are more ambitious with their scheme than was the Anome...I like air at my neck instead of the torc, but now the Green and Purple want me to pay for my liberty. Which is better: cheap submission or expensive independence?"

Through the dusk rolled the diligence, along streets which seemed quaint and small, dearly familiar and somehow remote. On Kahei, Garwi had seemed a dream — yet it existed. Here in Garwi, Kahei had become an abstraction, and it too existed. Elsewhere was

the world of the black globe ships with the human crews. He would never learn the actuality of this world.

The diligence halted before Fontenay's Inn; the driver looked truculently down at Etwane. "Now, then, my money, if you please."

"One moment." Etwane went into the inn, to find Fontenay sitting at a table enjoying a flask of his own merchandise. Fontenay frowned at the ragged apparition, then recognizing Etwane, uttered an ejaculation of astonishment. "What is this? Gastel Etwane in rags for a charade?"

"No charade, but an adventure from which I have only now returned. Be so good as to pay off this importunate driver, then let me have a room, a bath, a barber, some fresh garments, and finally a good dinner."

"Nothing could give me more pleasure," said Fontenay. He snapped his fingers. "Heinel! Jared! See to Gastel Etwane's convenience!" Fontenay turned back to Etwane. "Can you guess who plays music on yonder bandstand? In half an hour he will arrive."

"Dystar the druithine?"

"Alas, not Dystar! It is Frolitz and his Pink-Black-Azure-Deep Greeners."

"This is good news," said

Etwane from the depths of his heart. "I can think of no one I would rather see."

"Well, then, make yourself comfortable. A merry evening lays before us."

Etwane bathed himself with zeal: the first warm bath he had known since departing Fontenay's with Ifness. He dressed in fresh garments; then a barber trimmed his hair and shaved his face. What of his sour-smelling rags? He was tempted to keep them for mementos, but threw them away.

He went down to the common room, to find Frolitz in conversation with Fontenay. Frolitz leapt to his feet and embraced Etwane. "Well, then, my lad! I haven't seen you for months, and I hear that you have enjoyed a picaresque adventure! You always were the one for foibles and quixotries! But now, here you are, and looking — how shall I say it? — full of strange knowledge. What music have you been playing?"

Etwane laughed. "I started to learn a Great Song of fourteen thousand cantos, but mastered only twenty or thereabouts."

"A good beginning! Perhaps we shall hear some of these tonight. I have taken on another man, a clever young Paganese, but he lacks elasticity. I doubt if he will ever learn. You shall have your old seat, and Chaddo can work the sliding

bass. What do you say to that?"

"I say, first, that I cannot play tonight; I would astound you all! Second, I am famished for a meal; I have been to Caraz and subsisted on porridge. Third, in regard to the future: it is a void."

"Outside interests constantly interfere with your music," declared Frolitz peevishly. "I suppose you came to meet your old friend, whose name I forget. I have seen him often during the past few days; for a fact, there he goes now, to his usual table in the corner. Take my advice and ignore him."

"The advice is good," said Etwane in a strained voice. "Nevertheless, I must have a word with Ifness, and I will join you later."

Etwane crossed the room, to stand before the table in the corner. "I am surprised to see you."

Ifness looked up blankly, then gave a brusque nod. "Ah, Etwane, you catch me at a hurried moment. I must take a quick meal and depart."

Etwane sank into a chair and stared into the long austere face as if to bring forth Ifness' secrets by visual suction. "Ifness, one of us must be insane. Who is it, you or I?"

Ifness made an irritated gesture. "It would work to the same effect; in either case, an equal disparity of opinion would exist.

But, as I put forward, I —”

Etzwane spoke as if he had not heard. “Do you recall the circumstances of our leave-taking?”

Ifness frowned. “Why should I not do so? The event occurred at a place in north-central Caraz on a day I cannot precisely name. I believe that you departed in pursuit of a barbarian maiden, or some such thing. As I recall, I warned you against the project.”

“This was the general nature of the event. You went off to arrange a rescue operation.”

A waiter set a tureen before Ifness, who raised the lid, sniffed, then ladled forth a bowl of green sea-fruit soup. Ifness came back to Etzwane’s remark with an abstracted frown. “Let me see, what were the circumstances? They included the Alul tribesmen and Hozman Sore-throat. You wanted to organize a gallant expedition into the skies to rescue a girl who had struck your fancy. I pronounced such an effort impractical and even suicidal. I am glad to see that you were dissuaded.”

“I remember the matter from a different perspective,” said Etzwane. “I proposed to capture the depot ship; you stated that such an acquisition would interest the Earth folk and that a rescue ship might arrive in a minimum of two or three weeks.”

“Yes, this was the case. I mentioned the matter to Dasconetta, who felt that such a step exceeded the capabilities of his office, and nothing came of it.” Ifness tasted of his soup and sprinkled a few flakes of pepper pod upon the surface. “In any case, the eventualities were the same, and you need feel no more concern.”

Etzwane controlled his voice with an effort. “How could eventualities be the same when a shipload of captives is taken to a far planet?”

“I speak in a broad sense,” said Ifness. “As for myself, my work has taken me far afield.” He glanced at his chronometer. “I have yet a few minutes. The asutra that I took here in Shant, and others, have been studied. You may be interested in what I have learned.”

Etzwane leaned back in his chair. “By all means, tell me about the asutra.”

Ifness consumed his soup with slow easy sweeps of the spoon. “Something of what I will tell you is conjecture, some is induction, some observation, and some derives from direct communication. The asutra are a very old race, with an exceedingly long history. As we know, they are parasites evolved from a kind of swamp leech. They accumulate information upon the face of crystals inside their

abdomen. These crystals grow and the asutra grows. A large abdomen indicates much stored wisdom; the larger the abdomen, the higher the caste. The asutra communicate between themselves by nervous impulses, or perhaps telepathy; an array of specialized asutra is capable of the most complicated intellectual tasks.

"It is a truism that intelligence develops during a time of gradually worsening conditions; so it was with the asutra. They had and have a high reproductive rate; each asutra produces a million spawn which are oriented according to one of two modes and which must make juncture with an opposite mode to become viable. In the early days the asutra overpopulated their swamps and were forced to compete for hosts: a challenge which urged them to domesticate hosts, to build stables and pens, and to control their own reproductive rate.

"It is important to recognize the asutra dynamic, their basic psychic drive, which is the lust to dominate a strong and active host. This necessity is as fundamental as the force which turns plants to the sunlight, or prompts men to seek food when they are hungry. Only by recognizing this lust to dominate can the activities of the asutra be understood even dimly. I must remark here that many, if not all, of our original theories were naive and

incorrect. My researches, I am happy to state, have illuminated the truth.

"Because of their intelligence and their capacity to multiply this intelligence, and because of their natural predacity, asutra history has been complex and dramatic. They have passed through many eras. There was an artificial period, during which they used chemical nutrition, electrical sensations, imaginary knowledge. During a time of lassitude, mechanisms created seas of nutrient sludge, in which the asutra swam. During another era, the asutra bred optimal hosts, but these were conquered and destroyed by asutra on primeval hosts from the original slime. But these archaic hosts were moribund and nearly extinct; the asutra were stimulated to inter-planetary adventure.

"On the planet Kahei they discovered an environment almost identical to their own, and the Ka were compatible hosts. The asutra assumed control of Kahei, which over the centuries became to them a second home world.

"On Kahei they encountered a most unexpected and unwelcome circumstance. By subtle degrees the Ka adapted to the asutra, and slowly the roles began to shift. The asutra, rather than being the dominant member of the symbiosis, became subsidiary. The Ka began

to subject the asutra to undignified uses, as control nodes for mining engines, processing machinery and other unpleasant tasks. In other cases, the Ka employed arrays of joined asutra as computing machines or reference devices; essentially, the Ka used the asutra to augment their own powers, rather than the other way around. The asutra objected to such arrangements; a war occurred and the asutra on Kahei were enslaved. Henceforth, the Ka were the masters and the asutra the adjuncts.

"The asutra expelled from Kahei were anxious to discover new hosts. They came to Durdane, where the human inhabitants were as agile, durable and proficient as Ka and far more responsive to control. Durdane was too arid for their own comfort; across two or three centuries they conveyed many thousands of men and women to their home world and integrated them into their system of life. But they still coveted the world Kahei for its idyllic moors and delightful quagmires, and therefore they launched a war of annihilation against the Ka, using men as their slave warriors.

"The Ka, never a numerous folk, were assured of defeat by attrition unless they could stifle the human assault. As an experiment, the Ka contrived the Roguskhoi

and sent them to Durdane to destroy the human race. As we know, the experiment failed. Next, the Ka thought to use men as warriors against the asutra, but again the experiment met no success; their corps of slave warriors revolted and refused to fight."

Etzwane demanded, "How did you learn all this?"

Ifness made a casual gesture. He had finished his soup and was now eating a plate of assorted meats and pickled fruit. "I employed the facilities of the Historical Institute. Dasconetta, incidentally, is discomfited; I overwhelmed his pedantic inflexibility and indeed took the matter before Coordination, where I found active endorsement of my views. The Earth-worlds cannot tolerate human enslavement by alien races; this is fundamental policy. I accompanied the correction force in the nominal capacity of advisor to the commander, but in fact I directed the expedition.

"Arriving at Kahei, we found both the Ka and the asutra exhausted and discouraged with the war. In the north country we halted an engagement of warships, then enforced a peace, which was hard but fair. The Ka were required to surrender all their asutra and to repatriate all their human slaves. The asutra aban-

doned their attempt to dominate Kahei and also agreed to return all human hosts to Durdane. The solution to a highly complicated problem was elegantly simple, and within a common zone of comprehension. So there, in a most truncated outline, you have the situation as it exists now." Ifness drank from a cup of verbenia tea.

Etzwane sat hunched in his chair. He thought of the silver and white ships which had driven the Ka ships back from the black asutra globes. With a pang of bitter humor he recalled how defenseless and apathetic had been the training camp and with what illusory ease he and his men had captured it. The spaceship which they had taken with such grim determination — it actually had come to take them back to Durdane. Small wonder the resistance had been so scant!

Ifness spoke in a voice of polite concern: "You seem troubled; has my account distressed you?"

"Not at all," said Etzwane. "As you say, truth destroys many illusions."

"As you can apprehend, I was preoccupied with large causes and unable to attend the captured Alula, who presumably once again wander beside the Vurush River." He glanced at his chronometer. "What were your own actions subsequent to our parting?"

"They were of no great consequence," said Etzwane. "After some small inconvenience I returned to Shillinsk. I brought your boat back to Garwiy."

"That is good of you. Dasconetta sent a space car down to Shillinsk for me, which of course I used." Ifness glanced at his chronometer. "If you will excuse me, I must leave. Our association has spanned several years, but I doubt if we will meet again. I am leaving Durdane, and I do not plan to return."

Etzwane slumped back in his chair, said nothing. He thought of far places, of flowing rivers and nomad clans. He remembered terror aboard the transport ship and the death of Karazan; he thought of velvet-black moors and the purple-black morass; he recalled Polovits and Kretzel... Ifness had risen to his feet. Etzwane said, "At Shagfe is an old woman named Kretzel. She knows fourteen thousand cantos to the Great Song of the Ka. The knowledge will die with her."

"Indeed," Ifness hesitated, pulling at his long chin. "I will submit this information to an appropriate agency and Kretzel will be interviewed, no doubt to her profit. And now —"

Etzwane blurted, "Do you require an aide, an assistant?" He had not meant to ask the question;

his words had come of themselves.

Ifness smilingly shook his head. "Such an association would surely be impractical. Gastel Etzwane: good-by." He departed the inn.

Etzwane sat still and alone for fifteen minutes. Then he rose and went to another table across the room. His appetite had vanished; he called for a flask of strong wine. He became aware of music: Frolitz and the Pink-Black-Azure-Deep Greeners played a pleasant air of the Lor-Asphen uplands.

Frolitz came to stand by the table. He laid a hand on Etzwane's shoulder. "The man is gone, and just as well. He has had a baneful influence upon you; in fact, he has

distracted you from your music. Now he is gone, and things will be as before. Come play your khitan."

Etzwane looked into the depths of the cool wine, studying the lights and colors. "He is gone, but tonight I have no stomach for music."

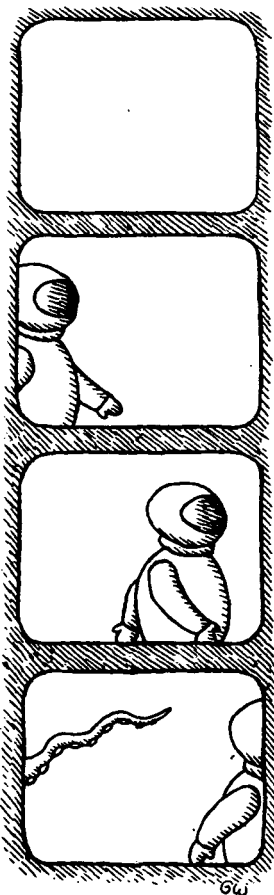
"Stomach?" scoffed Frolitz. "Who plays with his stomach? We use hands and breath and merry inclinations."

"True. But my fingers are numb; I would embarrass us all. Tonight I will sit and listen and drink a glass or two of wine, and tomorrow we will decide." He looked toward the door, though he knew that Ifness had gone.



BAIRD SEARLES

Films



THE VERY GOOD DR. PHIBES

It's almost a truism that genre films just aren't seen as anything but their genre, i.e. a film that appears as a "horror" film or a "science fiction" film is looked at by the powers in the film world (distributors, studio heads and critics) as an object not to be taken seriously, made for money and to be exploited for same, even if it happens to be a very good film. (This, as authors in the field well know, is also true of the literary side.) You can always cite "2001" as an exception, but Kubrick belongs to a tiny elite of directors whose work *must* be taken seriously — and even then, 9 out of 10 of the immediate reviews were of the "why-is-Kubrick-making-a-trashy-s-f-film" variety. So when a film comes along that is released by AIP (a company that releases a lot of really bad horror films — there is some justification in seeing them as all one thing) and stars Vincent Price, it receives an almost automatic reaction. This is tragic, because *Dr. Phibes Rises Again* is a stylish, witty, and altogether marvelous movie.

I had heard good things about "The Abominable Dr. Phibes" when it appeared in 1971, particularly its design, but thanks

to the peculiar distribution patterns of non-major films, managed to miss it. So when the second one appeared, I went with some anticipation, but not really that much considering how seldom sequels measure up to their originals. I certainly got more than I bargained for. DPRA succeeds on so many levels I hardly know where to begin.

For one thing, it's funny. Mostly camp (because the entire conception of the good doctor is camp), which like all humor, must be done just right. Here it is; with just that stylish outrageousness that is good camp. Dr. Phibes and his assistant, Vulnavia (a mute and gloriously beautiful spirit who plays Ariel to his Prospero) commit the most bloodchilling crimes with more super cool than a Lugosi and more theatrical flair than a Ziegfeld. One of the earlier murders, on shipboard on the way to Egypt, culminates in the body being washed up off Southampton in a bottle — a very large bottle. A funny idea, for which you were logically prepared by being shown the bottle earlier as part of a display for gin which was being carried as cargo.

Not all the humor is camp, however. There is a running sub-plot concerning two Scotland Yard men which is straight out of the great '50s period of English

comedy, those small black and white films starring Sellers, Guinness and Terry-Thomas before they were used in more expensive and less funny movies.

It's also a most effective shocker, probably because the atmosphere is so light that when a really horrid murder is perpetrated, it's just that much more grisly. There's one that still makes me crawl to think about; I won't go into detail, but it involves a plaster statue of the RCA dog filled with live scorpions. (The joke, even there, is that Phibes speaks through a mechanical apparatus connected with an antique phonograph horn — His Master's Voice indeed.)

And there is the design factor. In these days when it is cheaper to film on real locations than to build sets, an artfully designed movie of any sort is a rarity. DPRA is set in the '30s; the entire thing is done in Radio City Art Deco (a major factor in today's fashion and design, if you hadn't noticed) with touches of art nouveau, and it is truly beautiful. There's wit here, too. Art Deco derives much from Aztec and Egyptian angularity, and Phibes' hideaway in Egypt is decorated with jazz age figures done Egyptian tomb style. I might also mention his pink lucite organ (musical type organ) which at one point appears covered with cobwebs for a subtle visual joke. Not to mention the

coffin that is an exact replica in transparent glass of the classic Rolls Royce bonnet, complete with figurehead.

Even the music has great wit, from the 2001 takeoff as they enter the great tomb, to Vulnavia playing "Swan Lake" on a violin, to a final epic rendition of "Over the Rainbow."

The plot is a bit too thick to go into here. The first time I saw it, I kept losing track, but that was because there were so many wonderful details going that I'd get hung up on them. The second time around (I returned immediately to see it again) it fell into place quite neatly, given a bit of poetic and humorous license. My major criticism is that there is a feeling here of a film made with great care and edited down to the bone, another common problem with films, good or bad, slated to end up on the bottom half of a double feature.

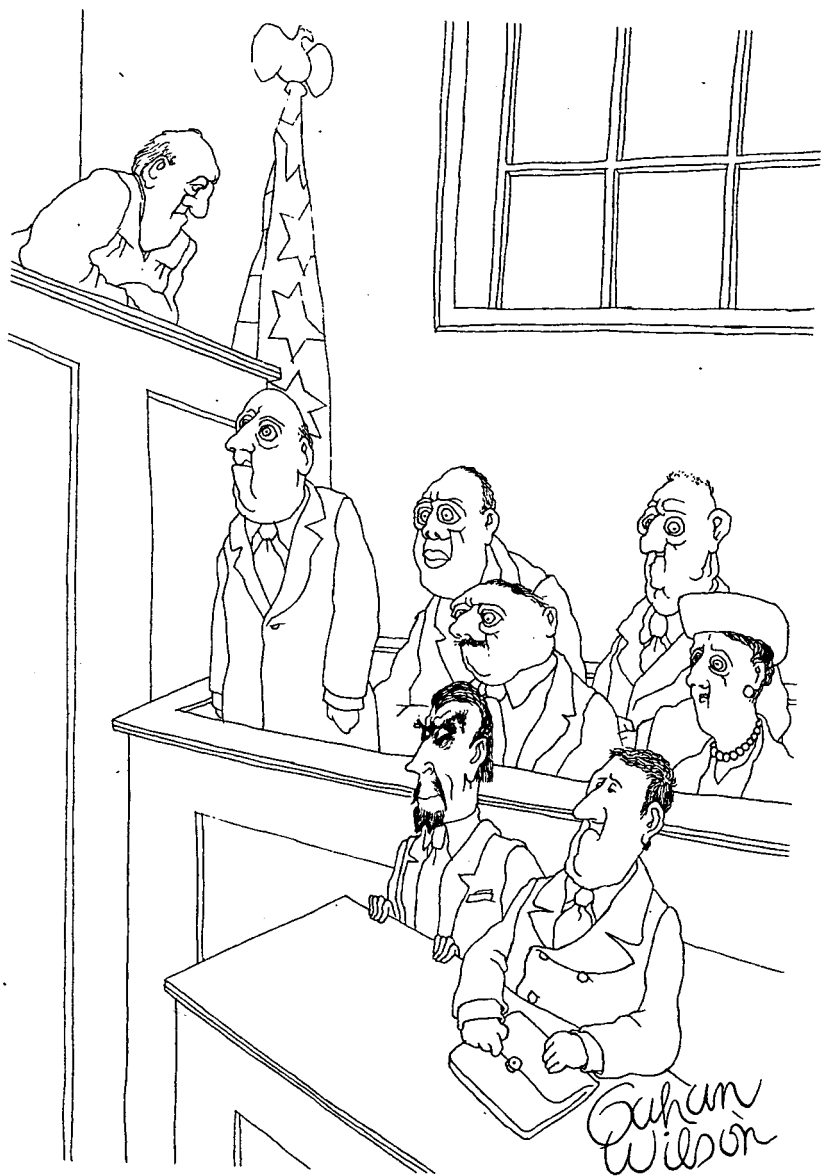
The cast is ideal. Price neatly combines his really fine acting talents ("Laura", for instance) with

his latter day excesses to be perfect as a monomaniac evil genius. Valli Kemp, as Vulnavia, looks like every cover of Famous Fantastic Mysteries with Egyptian hairdo and diaphanous draperies, doing sort of Isadora Duncan movements when she's not murdering people. She also handles a violin and a tuba convincingly. Fiona Davis is a prototypical '30s heroine, given to arched eyebrows and undressing in silhouette against her tent wall. Robert (Count Yorga) Quarry is an ideal steely-eyed antagonist to Phibes, and Peter Cushing, Terry-Thomas and Beryl Reid come on for beautifully done bits.

So...what else can I say? I eagerly await seeing Phibes #1 some day, and hope that a Phibes #3 is in the works — *if* it can keep up the standards.

Late, late show dept....A new Frankenstein was unveiled in two parts on late night TV; if it hadn't been for the good doctor P., I'd have had a lot to say about it, and may yet if next month is a dull one.





*"We... the members... of... the jury... find... the defendent
... not guilty."*

Snow. Can't say we've ever dashed through the stuff in a one-horse open sleigh, but it usually generates happy thoughts: kids rolling snowmen; downhill skiers making graceful parallel turns; a beautiful sight, we're happy tonight, walkin' in a winter wonderland. We still like snow, but Ms. Warner's chiller gave us pause...

Think Snow

by TORI WARNER

She had never skied before, and in fact this was her first time in a climate that permitted snow, and she watched it coming down outside the window, trying to understand what possible use the stuff might have. Snow to her was and is a simple destructive force.

"I should think that in a perfected world snow would be done away with. It's not a natural thing," Lucy announced.

"Huh?" Frank had been reading *Newsweek* and not paying much attention to his wife's speculations through the window.

"It's the snow that I don't like. I don't like it at all." It was a flat truth.

"Hmmm. You'll get used to it."

"I could get used to cancer too."

"What?"

"Never mind." She went off to the kitchen and began to study the offerings on the shelves of the refrigerator. Nothing appealed to her, so she checked the freezer and pulled out a TV dinner — chicken Kiev — and noted that science had found a way to prevent snowlike stuff from collecting itself on her freezer. It was "frost-free" and rendered superior to nature. But nature never followed suit and improved upon itself, but rather simply sat static and never moved off the composting earth.

"Those environmental groups are saps," she announced as the chicken Kiev descended upon the table.

"You're really in a hell of a mood tonight. What's the matter?" Frank took a bit of the soft chicken, and some butter drizzled down his chin. "Sorry," he said.

"I think it's the snow. I don't like it."

"Really? I thought that everyone loved snow." Frank was never abrupt, and he patiently listened.

"Who for God's sake?"

"Well, I don't know, but I do. Don't you think it's beautiful?"

"It's sterile, but it's anything but beautiful." She had judged snow's soul.

"It does keep the ground at an even temperature...and it hides that bare brown of the winter's earth. It also acts as a watershed for the spring melt." Then he added, "And it's beautiful!"

"No, it stores up too much water, then floods the grounds in the spring, rotting the daffodil bulbs and the rose roots. That's all it does. Makes a hateful mess."

"I've never heard you talk this way before! Do you really hate snow?"

"Yes, it's evil."

"How can evil be so white and clean?"

"Why must evil be always and forever black?"

"Rot is a black thing. Snow isn't. It's a preservative, yes, a white clean preservative like a savior descending. I don't really mean to be so corny, but that's the way I feel, and I think that most would agree with me."

"Leprosy starts off white..." she added.

"Leprosy smells. Snow doesn't smell."

"Not yet . . . not just yet. But it will. It will smell." Her voice was low and throaty, coming very deep in a rasping whisper. He watched her carefully, her mouth, her eyes and finally her hands, and decided that he would not be able to change her mind about snow this evening.

"You could try to go skiing. Snow's pretty handy when you're at the top of a mountain strapped into some metal skis," he added brightly, then got up and went into the kitchen to find some wine if there was any. The wine would help her. After all, hadn't that papist Aquinas said that when a fellow was depressed, he should either talk to a friend or drink a glass of wine or take a hot bath? And hadn't he gone even farther to suggest that if at all possible, a combination of the three cures would be helpful? Maybe it was Aristotle. Didn't matter, those guys really knew what they were talking about. But all he could find was an old bottle of Romanee-Conti which had been a wedding gift those three years ago.

"I've got the best idea I've had in years! Here, take a glass of this now, and afterwards you will join me in the bathtub, and we'll just sit in there and polish off this old bottle of Uncle Roland's. Just sitting and talking, the two of us!"

"What?"

"Come on, it'll be fun. You've never tried it."

"Have you?"

"No . . ." He smiled, and laughed a small laugh, a healthy laugh. She sat with her elbows on the table and rubbed her finger over her mouth, staring at him.

"You're very funny, really . . . very pure," she said and smiled at him. The bath therapy was a sweet childlike creation of Frank's. In the tub they sat facing each other, leaning at opposite ends of the small shell, drinking the rare wine out of the silver-plated goblets which had made up the rest of Roland's wedding gift. It was funny, very funny, and Lucy made an effort to be cheerful and not to bring up the matter of snow. And, in spite of herself, she began to enjoy herself.

"I was just thinking . . ." she murmured to him as he turned uncomfortably and somehow behind himself to turn on more hot water.

"Thinking what?"

"Thinking that I have a dentist's appointment tomorrow. I made it this afternoon."

"Oh?"

"Yes, my teeth feel weak."

The next day, the dentist confirmed that Lucy's teeth were rotting from the roots. She had not understood exactly what the

problem was, but the bone was withdrawing from the teeth, and the teeth were being kept in place by many small, still healthy membranes. It was rare, this disease, and unheard of in young people. Could she call him in the morning, and he would give her the results of consultations to be held with other doctors?

"We would advise you to have them pulled as soon as possible," was the consensus.

"I think just the same that I'll keep them for just a while longer," she said into the black phone, looking out the window at the large snowflakes now falling past. She associated the snow with her teeth, both were dead white, and she began to think of the foul breath that would certainly come from her teeth. It had to follow. Rottenesses could be smelled. And the smell would be a sticky glue of a stench, a carnivorous element. And her teeth grew worse each day, and the deterioration made itself known. But there was no pain. In fact, the roots of the teeth felt curiously warm and sweet, and she would worry them often for the soothing sensation, like rubbing a bruise. They were so beautiful and so white.

After a few days, she began to grow irritatingly bored with Frank's and the dentist's concern. They were continuously at her.

"Did you call the dentist today?" Frank asked in the evening.

"No, I don't think I'll talk to him again."

"For God's sake, you've got to do something! Get them pulled out and have the bone medicated like he says. Look, you're all I've got, and I want to keep you healthy. Please do it," he asked.

"Maybe, then, but I don't really like the man." And she wondered if Frank could smell the teeth yet.

But she didn't call the dentist, and she refused to answer the phone just in case they were trying to ferret her out. Still there was no pain, and her boredom increased as though too many seconds were jammed into each endless minute. Not calling the dentist gave her an enormity of free time, and not going in for a checkup gave her even more time. Now she longed to be even farther away from everyone's concern than her own apartment, and at this time she decided to follow her husband's recommendation and go skiing. She charged a black skiing outfit, close fitting, some boots and rented Head Standards and then went up into the mounains.

For a while she simply watched the skiers beginning their day on the slopes. She was new to all of this, and everything had a solemnity. There was silence. Men

and women issued from their cars, gathered up the boards and sticks of their crosses, and no one spoke. To a hidden metronome they began the sacred preparations for the Calvary. *Dominus vobiscum* I fasten my boots — *et cum spiritu* adjust the parka too — *in nomine patri* gather the skis — *et filii* go solemnly, one two three, right left — *et sanctus espiritus* (hush): *Suscipe, Sancte Pater* my eight dollars *quam ego tuus offero tibi*, speak softly, walk so slowly and vested now to make that Holy Ascension towards the crest, Penitentes alone in expiation, not walking now but transported as cowering monks on hard cold chairs above the snow, over the tops of trees upwards, over the faint odors of the white hood of the mountain, multiplying in hideousnesses. Snow. The procession moved at a dead march, leaving no wake behind, no stirring of air. Lucy too rose in that vacuum and trying to catch her breath, took in the heavy odor. Her cough was the only sound.

At the end she came off the lift awkwardly, but she did not fall. A few ski patrolmen smiled at her from behind strong teeth and out of tanned faces set or skewered onto broad shoulders and helpful bodies. Guardians of the Styx. *Asperges me*, she thought to herself uncertain why but then again,

asperges me. The tracks across the snowfields were long white stems, and she put her skies together, aiming them slowly downwards across and into the tracked snow. So easy! So very simple: Aim and go. *Ite skiing est.* Elemental and exciting. And still she did not fall, but continued down as she had to, not knowing how to stop. Down now and into the trees.

They were straight and firmly rooted, sentinels, and they too were covered as the ground by the snow. It hung heavily on their branches, holding them each winter, weighting them so that the limbs could no longer lift towards the sun, up, but were slung in traction to the earth. Flowers avoided this with a wisdom given to smaller things, recoiling from the white malignancy. It was an indication, all of it. As stopping was impossible, Lucy could no longer stay with the pines. All forces were pulling her downwards with icy gravity, and at times she crossed her skis, now in front, now behind, always somehow to recover. It was a difficult trail, perhaps a trial, and when she opened her mouth to scream, the cold entered into her and her mouth closed. Moving faster now, this *marche* could not be reversed. Pilgrims do not walk backwards, and now in the clearing she rode the black planks more painfully than before; the boots had turned hard with the

cold. Then still standing, she slipped past a signpost, a flash arrowing to "Kali's Plunge." She tried to make out the words by glancing sideways, and as her body had turned, the skis shifted to transport her to the beginning of the chute. It fell downwards in varying cliffs, then softened.

She rode it easily now, wondering why people bothered to take lessons for such a simple travail. There were alternate methods, she had heard, and aficionados often argued over which was the better. Ridiculous. But just a minute more down the banked gulch, she began to lose control, wanting now to stop but powerless and going suddenly impotent. The steel edges of the skis too were unable to hold themselves onto the mountain, and she saw herself in jacquard flashes alternating to other currents, memories of memory, concepts, her health, a moment of music, a spiraling volley into the body of snow, teeth, speed and fright of that speed which melted into nothing; not the parallelogram of forces; it was nothing in no body. It could not touch, hold, comfort or warm, and her speed was only a rustle when gravity passed by. An instant only: the sudden whiff of the snow, stronger than the general.

She was no longer worried about her legs rigidly clamped into

the skis — they could be broken, cut off and cast away. Or saved in a jar, impressive in purple preservatives alongside the tonsils and appendix as bookends, eerie monuments to immortality. But she could not cut off a smile, nor could she pluck out the snow. She knew suddenly that she was losing her clarity; she could not think inside a spun-out head. Fighting for recovery was straining, and with whatever was left of her recognition she saw that she had passed the “Plunge” and was alone in a group of quaking aspens. She reached, both arms lunging, for the trunk of any tree to break her speed, then came to a stop in an inhuman embrace.

Breathing was too heavy to hold, and her heart pumped in counterrhythms to the lungs. She bent down to rest, grateful to be alone with no one talking in echoes to her. One-two-one-two: Breathing. Two-one-two: Heart. Then slowly she pulled her forces through her body, dragging the strings sideways and upwards, until she breathed slower now and more supplely, relaxing above the lifeless feet clamped to steel and solid-black boots.

She heard sounds and voices. Frank called to her through a deep night; strangers too called for her, and an organ played a cave-damp song for her, and the music had

been written not in black notes, but white on black spaces. The negative of a lyric. It moved to a crescendo, then into a low drawl on a slowing turn-table until it stopped. Lucy pulled herself upright and moved her head slowly from side to side. The stupor was long in leaving, and she breathed deeply in a thirst for oxygen that was not there. The stench of the snow overpowered and choked her into a battle to separate out that stench and leave her some small air. She began to feel her mind sinking again, this time into a rush of white water, moving fast and poured from the melting snow, and she was hurtling along searching an eddy and never finding one. Next she was pulled, ripped limply over a waterfall to be caught in the whirlpools that fix themselves at the bottom of such falls. There the water does not move, but tosses in upon itself in froth and sparkles. Water, even white, was snow-destroyed. It was Lucy's victory for a moment, and she steadied herself to move through the aspen grove cautiously, but crippling more deeply into the pervading strength around her. The snow had reached out for her, and she embraced the consummation.

At the end of two tracks in an aspen grove lay only a black stain joined into the snow; the skis lay far away crisscrossed, and the air held a vacuum in it.

The lifts close at 3:30 pm, when the bitter cold sets in and the shadows freeze the crust on the slopes. The skiers, exhilarated or broken, come then to the base jovially, each insisting he had ridden the last chair up. Later, they form the procession to their cars, and by sundown the parking lot is emptied, while the bartender who has assembly-lined hot wine and Irish coffees closes his business and walks gingerly over the ice to his car and on to his home. His is usually the last car to leave. Tonight, there was another, left a distance from his own. He thought of walking back to the closed bar and to the telephone, but it was a difficult walk, and he would hate to cry wolf if the car belonged to some chick who had left happily in someone else's car. You never know, do you? No, you never know.

It did not snow that night, nor was the moon bright. And Lucy did not come home. Frank held himself calm until eight, the deadline that he had set for her safe return. He called the ski shack: no answer. The hospitals: no Lucy. The bar at the slope: no answer, then he called the police, apologizing for the inconvenience to them. The police called the rescue corps, and things were set in motion. Frank stood outside his car, shivering in the parking lot which was filled with cars again from the rescue crew. He

looked up the mountain, searching for a lonely skier.

The rescue workers moved with torches and flashlights. Those with the fire torches were the more fortunate for the heat; the others had more light. They worked together, combing through the night. By dawn, Lucy had not been found. Frank was now in his car with his lights still on as a signal to his wife, still awake somehow and looking blearily always upwards. It was coldest before the dawn. Raw. When the lift operators arrived, Frank trudged behind them into the shack and had some coffee with them. He could not speak and sat slumped over a table searching out the rim of the mug with his lips. His eyes felt swollen; his insides withered.

The rescue team worked until ten o'clock when the skiers began their ritual motions towards the slopes, knowing already of the day's mission and sending feelings of brotherhood among each other. They joined the search. No one found Lucy, or any part of Lucy, although one skier, a young boy with pink cheeks and braces, discovered two lonely tracks through a grove of aspens, and he had followed them.

"That's right, two tracks that stopped about a hundred yards in — just stopped. Ended in something that reminded me of

asparagus, if you know what I mean — tracks and then feathery, and a point. But no footprints after that, and no tracks nearby. Nothing.”

And in front of the cameras and the news interviewer with a

portable mike he said in a breath of frosty haze, “That’s what I said, like a huge asparagus had been laid into the snow and at the end of the tracks, a weird smell. Dunno what it was . . . smelled awful.”



RECOLLECTION, PUNISHING

In that sweet thicket hunting
When day was half a dawn
And light not yet a dapple
Beside the dappled fawn,

In that sweet thicket hunting
When dew made silver rain,
And fragrant boughs were fresher
Than boughs can be again,

In that sweet thicket hunting
He found a dragon’s cave
And now he only mumbles
That someone was not brave.

— *Doris Pitkin Buck*

In which freelance writer Jose Silvera, on the planet Carob to ghostwrite a book for the Body Electric Church, finds himself mixed up with kidnaping, attempted assassination and other church business...

Varieties of Religious Experience

by RON GOULART

The robot organ ceased its hymn, and the yellow-robed reverend climbed up to the pulpit. He tapped his fingers twice on each of the three microphones, clearing his throat.

At the rear of the small domed chapel Jose Silvera narrowed his eyes. He had a pew near the animated stained-glass windows, and the flashing colored light was moderately distracting. Hunching his wide shoulders once, Silvera extracted a notebook from his trousers and flipped it open on one knee.

Reverend Newt Barndoor was ticking his thumbnail against the center mike. "Isn't the Territorial News Network picking me up this

morning? Their mike is dead." Barndoor was a short wiry man of thirty-six. "Excuse me a moment, my friends." He bent down behind the pulpit and reappeared holding a hand pixphone. He punched out a number, waited.

The robot organ hummed and then rumbled into a new hymn.

"I'm trying to make a call," said Reverend Barndoor. "Keep still, won't you?"

The large silver and gold organ behind him piped a final note and turned off.

"Hello, this is the Reverend Barndoor out here at the Body Electric Church," the reverend said into the phone. "Are you people going to cover my sermon this

morning? Oh, really. A news emergency. The Bishop Briney Brigade has kidnaped another official of the Portada Territory government? Who was it? No, don't bother to go and ask. Well, if you want. Yes, I'll hold." Putting one small hand over the phone mike, Reverend Barndoor told the fifty parishoners in the chapel, "My sermon today is entitled *Sex and God through Electricity*. Interestingly enough, that is also the title of...Yes, I'm still hanging on. Bishop Briney kidnaped the Associate Minister of Minor Recreations, eh? I see, and you people are covering that. I understand. I was wondering why your mike here was dead." He raised his eyes to the ceiling, cocking his head to look between the revolving cherubs. "Now I notice, your cameras aren't on either. Very well then, I'll say a little prayer for the safe recovery of the Associate Minister. What? No, I don't actually need his full name. Well, if you have it handy." With his hand masking the speaking end of the small pixphone, Barndoor turned again to the people seated in the dozen rows of pews in the Body Electric Church. "As I was saying, *Sex and God through Electricity* is also the title of my forthcoming book, a project on which I am now engaged." He quickly winked at Silvera. "Yes?

Well, I'm certain I can do without his name. We'll simply pray for him under his title of Associate Minister. To be on the safe side we can pray for the whole Department of Minor Recreations. Good-by then, God bless you."

A cool hand touched Silvera's. "How are you progressing?"

Silvera smiled at the slender brunette who'd seated herself next to him. "I've got a good working title for the book."

"Reverend Barndoor can be discursive at times," said the lovely girl. She was wearing a sleeveless short-skirted suit of the same hue as Barndoor's robes. "I met you briefly when you arrived last night, Mr. Silvera. Probably you don't recall, since the reverend's reception party for you was a little...a little..."

"Discursive?"

"Yes. At any rate, I'm Electronic Nun JG Hulda Pierrepont," explained the long dark girl. "I was sitting on the revolving sofa next to you for a time last evening."

"Was that the one that started spinning too fast?"

"Oh, were you still there when Mr. Sollman got tossed out the window by centrifugal force? Or is it inertia that does that?"

"My dear friends," said Reverend Barndoor, "since many of you have been traveling the fifty weary miles from our capital city of

Centro out here to the Body Electric Church for, lo, almost a year now, I need not pause to prove once again the link between God and sex and electricity. No, for you have heard all the proof before. Many of you, a very pleasing percentage, have also participated in evening Body Electric Church sessions involving the Primal Closet and related items of religious hardware. So, therefore, let me begin today's sermon by..." Something buzzed inside the pulpit and Barndoor smiled. "Excuse me once again, dear friends." He rolled the sleeves of his yellow robe half way to his elbows and ducked out of sight.

"You needn't," said the lovely Hulda to Silvera, touching his arm, "jot all this down. I can provide you with a transcript after the service."

"Actually," explained Silvera, "I'm doodling."

Hulda turned the notebook so she could see the open page. "Oh, a little pig with a mustache. Very cute."

"It's supposed to be a cherub." Silvera pointed a thumb at the whirling vinyl cherubs high above.

"Cherubs don't have mustaches."

"That's his mouth."

The lovely girl smiled. "You creative people see things differently. I wish I was."

Reverend Barndoor had a

tabletop pixphone sitting sideways on the pulpit now, and a big blond man showed on the plate-sized screen. "You all of you know my right-hand man, Electronic Brother SG Gay Jacobis. Your call comes in the middle of my sermon, Brother Jacobis."

"Rat's ass," mumbled the blond young man. He inhaled, blinked. "Let me get hold of myself, Rev. Been having a few belts back here in the Electrified Sacristy. There. Feeling fine now. God bless you, Rev, and excuse my rude interruption. Wow! Whoopee! Did you ever drink six Venusian vodka martinis and then sit in one of your Primal Closets with the power turned way up? Yowie! Let me gather myself together. Forgive my festive language and God bless you and all your flock, Rev. Yowie yowie!"

"Did you have some message for me, Brother Jacobis?"

"Call me Gay," said Jacobis, blinking and making yawning motions with his mouth. "Let me organize my thoughts. Ah, yes. Our train has been canceled. You know, our little train for you know where. This afternoon's train has been called off, due to having been blown to smithereens by rebels and malcontents. However, this morning's train is still shipshape. Wowie wow! So we'll have to switch to this earlier train. Can you cut the

crapola short?"

"Certainly, Brother Jacobis. I'll meet you in the sacristy shortly."

"What did I ever see in him?" said Hulda quietly.

"Who?" asked Silvera.

"Nothing," answered the lovely girl.

"Fortunately, my friends," announced the reverend after dropping the big pixphone out of sight, "I have a tri-op recording of a sermon quite similar to this one. If Brother Nolan up in Communications Loft will punch it up, I'll make my hasty departure on important church business."

"What's the number?" called a nasal voice high in the rear of the Body Electric chapel.

"Sermon No. 87." The reverend smiled and gathered up the skirt of his yellow robe.

"What color box is it in?"

"Orange."

"Gee, they all are."

"I'll stop up and help you locate it, Brother Nolan. Meanwhile, our organ will play a hymn."

The robot organ quivered, hesitant.

"Go ahead," said the reverend. "It's all right this time."

As the new electronic hymn filled the chapel, Hulda leaned close to Silvera. "The reason I came looking for you," she said, "is that I just learned Reverend Barndoor has to leave earlier than antici-

pated. I'm to substitute for him and take you on your guided tour of our facility here. Show you the Research & Design Room and how the Primal Closet works, and so on. I imagine with a whole book to ghostwrite, you'll want to get oriented as soon as you can."

"I'd also like to know," said Silvera, "what material the reverend wants to put in the book."

"Didn't they tell you that when you were hired?"

"No," replied Silvera. "I've been out here on your planet, on Carob, for three months. Doing various freelance writing assignments. My literary agents, back on Barnum, set up this job with the Body Electric Church. All I know is the book is going to be called *Sex and God through Electricity* and it pays \$3000."

"\$2500," corrected Hulda.

"Though I suppose the figure is open to negotiation. Particularly with someone of your reputation. You've written several other books, as I understand it."

"Several," agreed Silvera.

The lovely Hulda poked her toes at the small heap her yellow dress made on the floor of the Research & Design Room. "Darn, this is always happening."

"How frequently?" Silvera was sitting, naked, on the lid of a trunklike electronic device.

"Well," answered the Electronic Nun JG, "only once before actually. When I became involved with Gay Jacobis. I thought it was an infatuation, but now I'm wondering if it isn't simply electricity."

Silvera swung down onto the thermal flooring and retrieved his trousers.

"Not that you aren't attractive, Joe," said Hulda. "I don't know, maybe I should stop demonstrating Reverend Barndoor's electronic devices to people. I seem to lose my head whenever I step inside one of these Primal Closets and throw the switch."

After pulling up his trousers, Silvera said, "Isn't that the purpose? Sex and God through electricity."

The lovely unclothed Hulda reached back and touched the pseudowood door of the electronic cabinet she and Silvera had recently occupied. "I don't feel any too spiritual." She sighed, bent to pick up her yellow lingerie. "Still, if you're going to write a book for Reverend Barndoor, you have to know about all the various religious appliances he's invented. Do you want to try the Primal Trunk next?"

"Not just yet." Silvera pulled his tunic on over his head.

"It's really pretty much like the Primal Closet, except the electric

shock is less and the music isn't so loud. Also somewhat more cramped inside." The lovely brunette gestured at the other half-dozen mechanisms sitting around the large room. "I don't even think we can both fit in the Primal Suitcase together. That one's designed for smaller people, petites." Dressed again, she continued. "The basic philosophy of Reverend Barndoor is based on an integration of man with the deep forces of nature and the wonders of..." She made a sneezing sound and began to cry, head low.

Stepping over the Primal Suitcase, Silvera put an arm around the sobbing girl's shoulders. "Easy now."

"Oh, it isn't postcoital depression. Nor postelectro letdown. No, I'm upset about something else." She looked at him. "You seem like a man of some integrity, Joe, even though you are a hack."

Silvera nodded. "Yes."

"I'm in possession of some knowledge no one is aware I have," said Hulda. "Now, don't think because we've been recently intimate I suddenly want to load you down with my personal problems. This, though is more a moral, and somewhat political, problem."

Silvera guided her over to a Primal Sofa, and, making sure it was turned off, sat her down. "Tell me."

"Gay Jacobis drinks."

"I noticed."

"When he drinks he talks," she went on. "Having, lord knows why, been fairly close to him until recently, I have heard certain things. My problem is, would it be betraying a confidence to tell what Gay blurted out in a drunken stupor?"

"No."

"I've been debating with myself for several days over this. I even came in and sat alone in the Primal Closet a few times," she said. "Nothing much happens when I'm inside by myself, though. Except I get a little heat rash around my shins."

"What Gay Jacobis said has something to do with Reverend Barndoor?"

"Yes, and with another admirable religious figure here in Portada Territory," said the lovely Hulda. "Gay is going to assassinate Bishop Briney."

"He can't do that."

"I feel the same way. Even though Bishop Briney is of a different faith and more given to aggressive acts against the government, still I believe him to be an honorable man who has been driven reluctantly underground by our repressive government. His work on behalf of student and labor groups in the territory has been admirable. And his play, *The*

Unfair Trial of Bishop Briney, is one of the clandestine hits of the season. I know you agree a man of his character and moral vigor shouldn't be killed."

"I don't care about all that," said Silvera. "I don't want him killed because he still owes me \$1200."

Hulda blinked. "You mean you've done some ghostwriting for Bishop Briney? I didn't realize you could work in more than one faith."

"I doctored the last two acts of his damn play."

"You mean the beautiful curtain speech closing Act II is yours?"

"Most of it."

"A beautiful, and spiritual, piece of writing."

"My agents got me the job while I was back on Barnum," said Silvera. "Somebody out here on Carob thought the play needed patching up and they smuggled it to Barnum. I was supposed to get \$2400."

"You mean you can write beautiful spiritual passages simply for money?"

"I can write anything for money," answered Silvera. "One of the reasons I came to your planet is to collect the remaining \$1200 Bishop Briney owes me. But the bastard's gone underground. I have a rule about always collecting fees."

"Have you been writing other things since you've arrived?"

"Yes. Campaign speeches, a book of lyric poetry aimed exclusively at homosexual lizard men and a series of Gothic novels for the 8-to 12-year-old market," said Silvera. "Get back to Gay Jacobis and how he's going to kill Briney."

"Well, Gay isn't really a disciple of Reverend Barndoor at all. During one of his many stupors, he confided in me he's actually a plant, a plain-clothes operative for the Portada Territory Secret Police. The dreaded PTSP. I wanted to warn the reverend, but I've been brought up to honor the sanctity of the bedroom. It's been a real moral tussle, these past few days."

"How is spying on Barndoor going to get him a crack at the bishop?"

"You don't know this, but Reverend Barndoor is an intimate friend and secret supporter of Bishop Briney," explained the lovely girl. "Though the reverend isn't aware the PTSP knows. His trip, the trip he and Gay left on over an hour ago, is really to be a secret visit to Bishop Briney."

"Why?"

"They're putting on a benefit performance of *The Unfair Trial of Bishop Briney*," said Hulda. "Tonight in the bishop's underground headquarters."

"Where's Briney hiding out?"

Hulda hesitated, then said, "Do you know where the Good Food Supermarket Complex is in Centro City?"

"Passed it on the way out here. You mean he's hiding in a health food store?"

"Underneath. Ours is a very old territory, Joe, and it seems there are ancient catacombs way down below the market complex. Very few people know the catacombs are there, certainly not the secret police."

"Why are they staging the play now?"

"To raise funds. Apparently Bishop Briney's scheme to kidnap key men in the territorial government isn't having the desired effect. So far he's kidnaped the Assistant Superintendent of Indoor Parks, the Co-Chairman of the Teaching Mechanism Board, the Associate Arbitrator of Agricultural Disputes and the Junior Co-ordinator of Underground Rapid Transit. It hasn't paralyzed the government at all. In fact, the opp..."

There was a loud popping noise across the room and a crackling of light. "Here you are, Mr. Silvera," said the plump figure who had materialized, flickeringly. "You've kept me hopping."

Silvera left the girl and walked toward the shimmering image. "Who are you?"

"F. Hugh Hobbs," grinned the plump forty-three year old man. "We met once in Tarragon. Though now I'm with the Carob office of Barnum Credit Mobilier. As you realize, what you're seeing is merely a tri-op Intrusion Projection of me. Right this minute I'm in the main office on Academy Street in the capital. Let me tell you, Mr. Silvera, it takes a real lot of rigmarole to get a permit for one of these intrusion things. Clerks, judges, the works. Then there's all the business of triangulating and tracking your body emanation patterns and focusing the projector."

"Why exactly are you intruding on me?"

The plump Hobbs held up a flickering grey card. "Can you read that?"

"No. It's blurred."

"All the rigmarole and I still come in out of focus," said Hobbs. "What can you expect these days? This card authorizes me to repossess your air cruiser, Mr. Silvera."

"I don't own an air cruiser."

"Yes, you do," said the three-dimensional projection of Hobbs. "It's back on Barnum in a private airdome. Model 8076-22. Purchased three years ago on Barnum, financed through our head office there. You still owe \$426 on it, Mr. Silvera, and have

for the past several months."

"That cruiser? I sold it a year ago to a guy who writes how-to books. He assumed the payments."

"Not according to our master files, Mr. Silvera. So then, can you pay the \$426 or do we repo?"

"Take it back then."

"We'd settle for \$100 and an agreement, even a handshake agreement, to pay the rest as soon as possible."

"I don't want to shake hands with an optical illusion."

"How about \$50 now and skip the handshake?"

"Nope."

"Very well," said the image of Hobbs. "I'll present your version of the facts to the people here, and they'll recheck with our Barnum office." The plump projection faded away before the last words were out.

"How could they have made such a mistake?" said Hulda, with sympathy.

"They didn't," said Silvera. "I don't have a spare \$426 right now. How is Gay Jacobis planning to do in the bishop?"

"I'm not exactly certain," replied the girl. "He's intending to do it sometime during the performance. You see, Reverend Barndoor usually acts in the role of Misguided Civic Violence whenever he can. So he'll be in the cast, and I don't know where Gay will be."

"Barndoor and Jacobis caught the last train to the city," said Silvera. "I'll have to borrow transportation."

"I've a landcar I can lend you. May I tag along?"

"No," said Silvera.

Silvera parked the borrowed landcar at the edge of a riot. All around the late afternoon parking area sign-waving men were tangling with the capital city police. Several hundred battling men filled much of the clear space around the vast Good Food Market complex. Dozens more were tussling on the catwalks between the separate domes of the mammoth health food center. Some of the police, the ones in blue and gold uniforms, were mounted and swinging stun rods at the crowd. They rode grouts, the six-legged semibovine animal native to the Barnum System of planets.

As Silvera jumped to the pink-tinted ground, a sprawl of rioters came smashing back through the thin see-through fencing of his particular parking section. Mounted police were forcing them backward. The grouts reared, four of their six gold-shoed hooves flashing in the air.

A shaggy cat man in striped overalls tripped into him and his pole sign thunked down on Silvera's dark head. The sign read

Boycott Lotus!

Snatching the pole as the cat man fell on by him, Silvera swung the sign like a battle-ax and cleared a path for himself.

Ten overalled lizard men were unfurling a banner — *A Fair Deal For Lotus Pickers!* — immediately outside the smashed-in fence. Silvera edged around them and dodged ahead, head down, with the sign held now as a shield.

A thin man in sky-blue coveralls grabbed him. "Into the wagon, mister," he ordered.

"Who are you?"

"A plain-clothes police infiltrator," explained the thin man. "Come on, we want to round up all you dirty lotus pickers."

Silvera swung the pole end of his sign up between the man's coveralled legs and flipped him over into a cluster of punching men.

Silvera ran on. Up closer to the health food markets lotus pickers were hurling handfuls of lotus fruit at the police. The foot police were lobbing bright orange ball-shaped containers of pacifying gas back at them.

He backtracked and decided to approach his destination from the rear. According to Hulda there was a hidden entrance down to the catacombs in the storeroom of a place called the Soy Shop. On impulse he suddenly threw himself

to the ground and a grout and rider went sailing over him.

Sprawled on the scarlet-tinted paving was a familar-looking green man. Silvera rolled the dazed man over onto his back. "Senator Sanborn?"

Sanborn's lime-green eyelids flickered. "Associate Senator," he said, coming fully awake. "Oops." The Associate senator clutched his middle, then sighed.

"Do you have a stomach injury?"

"Oh, hello, Silvera," said the green man. "Say, those campaign speeches you wrote for me a few months back really did the trick. I won a landslide victory over my opponents. The slogan you coined did it. 'Throw the rascals out!' Every time I waved my riding crop in the air and cried, 'Throw the rascals out!' I could feel the crowd empathizing with me." He rubbed his stomach again, lowered his voice and mumbled something.

Silvera couldn't hear him above the sounds of the riot. "Beg pardon?"

Getting to his knees, the green associate senator said, "I'm on a special hush-hush mission for the Under Treasury. Looks as though I picked a bad time." Sanborn stood, waved a fist at the rioting crowd. "Throw the rascals out!" He shrugged. "It doesn't work every time."

"You have to get their attention first," said Silvera. "Just what sort of secret mission?"

"What did you say?"

"I said, what kind of mission are you on, Senator?"

I guess I can trust you, Silvera," the associate senator shouted at Silvera's right ear. "It has to do with Bishop Briney.

A flung sign reading *EAT NO MORE NON-UNION LOTUS!* came spinning, and they both ducked.

"I'm going to see Briney, too."

"I didn't catch that last remark, Silvera."

"I'm here to see Briney, too."

"What a coincidence," yelled the associate senator. "He and his followers are hiding in the ancient catacombs beneath this very shopping area. Then I suppose you know that."

"Yes." Silvera took the associate senator's arm and helped him across this parking section, watching the green man pat his stomach. "Money belt," said Silvera.

"What?"

"You're wearing a money belt, aren't you?"

"Yes," shouted Sanborn. "I'm secretly carrying \$10,000. It's ransom."

"Ransom?"

"For the kidnaped Assistant Superintendent of Indoor Parks, the Co-Chairman of the Teaching

Mechanism Board, the Associate Arbitrator of Agricultural Disputes, the Junior Co-ordinator of Underground Rapid Transit and the Associate Minister of Minor Recreations," yelled the associate senator. "Bishop Briney's decided to sell them back to us."

"I thought he was going to hold them until the government was paralyzed."

"He's concluded you can't paralyze the Portada government this way. He keeps kidnaping high officials, and it has no effect. When he snatched the Co-Chairman of Teaching Mechanisms, nobody even noticed for nearly three days."

They were at the far end of the skirmish, nearing a passageway which led to the rear of the complex. "Did you know some of your people are planning to assassinate the bishop today?"

Associate Senator Sanborn halted. "No? Whose cockeyed idea is that? Wait, don't tell me. I bet I know. The Portada Territory Secret Police. Am I right?"

"That's who, yes." They moved into the yellow-tinted alleyway.

"Those PTSP guys never think about anything else," said Sanborn. "They're so damned circumspect. They know they're supposed to have senatorial and associate senatorial approval for all their assassinations. We never voted on Bishop Briney. Well, I'll have to

warn him when I hand over the cash."

"Stop," said a cat man in crimson overalls. Instead of a sign he carried a silver-barreled blaster rifle. "Step along this way and into the Soy Shop." He was standing at the passageway's end, his rifle aimed at them. "We need a few more hostages. It helps later when we have to bargain with the police."

"I have an urgent..." began Sanborn, then stopped himself.

"We're certainly getting a lot of well-dressed middle-class hostages today," observed the lotus picker as he urged them into the Soy Shop.

A tall forty-three-year-old blonde was whispering to Silvera. "I can't be too explicit because we're under guard, but are you here for the you-know-what?" She pointed one finger cautiously at the floor of the storeroom.

"Which you-know-what?" said Silvera. There were five hostages beside himself and the associate senator in here behind the Soy Shop, all guarded by a lizard man in overalls.

"The bishop's you-know-what."

"Yes." Hulda the electronic nun had told him one of the entrances down to the ancient catacombs was in this room.

"We have aisle seats," said the blonde woman, nodding at her green husband. "It's nearly 7:20,

almost time for the curtain to rise on the you-know-what. I'm really very anxious to see this particular you-know-what. It got rave reviews over in Vibora Territory. As I recall, the critic on the *Vibora Bulletin* called it, 'One of the great you-know-whats of our generation.' Have you seen it before?"

"I wrote the last two what-you-may-call-its," he told her and moved to a new position in the room.

Associate Senator Sanborn had been trying again to talk their lotus-picker guard into letting them go. He came back to Silvera, shaking his head. "Can you imagine? He insists the rioting is still going on out there. Three hours and..." he checked his watch "...twenty three minutes. A long time for a riot."

"Maybe they're trying for a record." In the right-hand corner of the room stood a large safe. Hulda had told him it was a dummy which would swing aside to allow them to use a stairway leading down to where Bishop Briney and his followers were hiding. "I wonder if he'll put on the play tonight at all."

"Probably so. There are two other secret ways besides this one to get down there, and I don't believe the rioting has closed them."

Silvera reached up and rested one large hand on a shelf near his

shoulder. It was stacked with bubble containers of Soy Cafe. "Gay Jacobis is going to make a try for the bishop during *The Unfair Trial of Bishop Briney*, meaning he'll be doing it any minute now."

"Usually the curtain on these plays is delayed a few minutes," said the associate senator. "Even so, time is fast running out." He shook his green head. "I wouldn't try to rush the guard, Silvera. He tells me he's won several scrolls for sharpshooting at recent lotus-pickers picnics."

There was a loud popping explosion to the immediate left of the guard and a crackling of light. "Why can't you ever stay put, Mr. Silvera?" asked the projection of F. Hugh Hobbs.

The lizard man guard whirled to face the newly materialized credit man. He swung his rifle to cover the image.

Silvera grasped one of the two-pound bubbles of soy coffee and tossed it straight at the lizard man. When the bubble smacked into the guard's scaly temple, Silvera was on him. He chopped two flat-hand blows against his blue-green neck and then yanked his rifle from his grip.

The big guard made a protesting oof and slumped down hard on the rose-tinted flooring.

Silvera flipped the guard over on his front, twisted his arms

behind his neck and tied the wrists together with strips of synthetic cloth ripped from the lizard man's overalls. He gagged him and then trussed up his booted feet.

"Have I come at an inopportune time?" asked the flickering Hobbs. "I thought I'd hit you now and not mess up your dinner hour. It turns out, Mr. Silvera, you do indeed owe on that air cruiser. I guess you were trying to jolly me into..."

Silvera pulled Sanborn over to him and jerked the green man's pullover tunic up out of his trousers. He unzipped a pouch in the grout-hide money belt and grabbed out a handful of cash. "One hundred, two hundred, three hundred, five hundred, seven hundred, nine hundred, eleven hundred, twelve hundred," he said, stuffing the rest of the cash back into the associate senator's pouch.

"Silvera?" said Sanborn, tucking his tunic into his trousers. "If you're a little short of cash, I can maybe help you out. This money I'm carrying is a sacred trust."

Silvera unfolded \$450 from the money he'd taken. "Here's some money, Hobbs. Can you collect it from where you are?"

"Sure thing," grinned the plump Hobbs. "Put it on what looks to be my hand, and it'll be in the active teleporting range. I can

even repo a fairly heavy truck by teleportation."

After the cash had popped away, Silvera said, "Let's save Bishop Briney's life so he can vouch for the \$1200 payment."

Hobbs faded away, and Silvera and Sanborn ran for the fake safe.

"I see they've redecorated the catacombs considerably," remarked the associate senator as he and Silvera jogged along a twisting underground corridor. "I don't know as I care for the color..." He fell forward, skidded on hands and knees into a white-washed stone wall. The green man had tripped over a pair of feet extending from a low alcove.

The feet were tangled in the skirt of a yellow robe. Silvera tugged at them, and the Reverend Barndoor came sliding into view. He was unconscious, breathing through his mouth, bound with electric cords and wires. "Gay Jacobis must have done this," said Silvera.

From a distance, somewhere ahead of them, came the sound of applause. "Curtain time. The first act will be awkward, won't it? Since the reverend here is supposed to be playing the part of Misguided Civic Violence."

Silvera snapped his fingers, straightened. "Gay Jacobis is going to take over the role. It'll give him a

chance to get close to the bishop with a gun."

"The play's symbolic. The gun won't be real in the confrontation between Bishop Briney and Civic Violence."

"It'll be real tonight." Silvera left the green associate senator and went running toward the applause. Under his arm he still carried the blaster rifle he'd taken from their lotus-picker guard.

Silvera found he was approaching a circular theater area from the left. Out on the stage Bishop Briney, a large heavy-fleshed man of fifty was wrestling with Temptation. Temptation was played by a pretty black girl of twenty. Urban Corruption and Local Graft were waiting in the shadows to the left of the elevated stage. Silvera didn't see Gay Jacobis anywhere.

Stopping for a moment close to the stage, Silvera then pushed the two actors aside and leaped up over the footlights.

Bishop Briney, astride the fallen Temptation, glanced up. "Bless me, it's Silvera the writer."

In a rough approximation of the

heavy bishop's burry voice Silvera cried out, "A worse tyranny than that is the unleashed anarchy of Misguided Civic Violence."

From stage right Gay Jacobis came stumbling. "Whoopee," he said. "I guess I'm woozier than I figured. I didn't think I was supposed to enter for a good five minutes yet. Yowie. Never ignore a cue, first rule of the theater." He lifted the real blaster pistol he held in his hand, pointing at the still-kneeling bishop.

Silvera squeezed the trigger of his rifle, and it sizzled once. The pistol flipped from the blond police assassin's grasp.

"Yowie," said Jacobis, hopping madly.

"Bravo, bravo," called the audience. "Brilliant theater."

"It looks like we've missed a good part," said the forty-three-year-old blonde woman as she and her green husband began hunting for seats.

"I owe you my life," said Bishop Briney, rising.

"No, you owe me \$1200," said Silvera. "Which I've already collected."



From Brian Lumley: "I was born ('spawned', HPL might have it) 1937 on the Northeast coast of England. At twenty I married and within a year became a mercenary with the army (meaning the dread corps of Royal Military Police). Since then my travels have taken me to Nemedra (Germany, if you like), Cyprus, Malta and Ireland." Sgt. Lumley's fiction has appeared in such collections as *Tales of the Cthulhu Mythos*, *Dark Things*, and in volumes 1 and 2 of *The Year's Best Horror Stories*.

Haggopian

by BRIAN LUMLEY

Richard Haggopian, perhaps the world's greatest authority in ichthyology and oceanography, to say nothing of many allied sciences and subjects, was at last willing to permit himself to be interviewed. I was jubilant. At least a dozen journalists before me, from various parts of the world, had made the futile journey to Kletnos in the Aegean to seek Haggopian the Armenian out; but only my application had been accepted. Three months earlier, in June, Hartog of *Time* had been refused, and before him Mannhausen of *Weltzukunft*, and therefore my own superiors had seen little hope for me. And yet the name of Jeremy Belton was not unknown in

journalism. I had been lucky on a number of so-called "hopeless" cases before. Now, it seemed, this luck of mine was holding. Richard Haggopian was away on yet another ocean trip, but I had been asked to wait for him.

It is not hard to say why Haggopian excited such interest among the ranks of the world's foremost journalists. Any man with his scientific and literary talents, with a beautiful young wife, with an island-in-the-sun, and — perhaps most important of all — with a blatantly negative attitude toward even the most beneficial publicity, would certainly have attracted the same interest. And to top all this Haggopian was a millionaire.

For eight frustrating days I had waited on the Armenian's return to Haggopiana — his tiny island hideaway two miles east of Kletnos and midway between Athens and Iraklion, purchased by and named after himself in the early '40s — and just when it seemed that my strictly limited funds must surely run out, then Haggopian's great silver hydrofoil, the *Echinoidea*, cut a white scar on the incredible blue to the southwest as it sped in to a midmorning mooring.

With binoculars from the flat white roof of my Kletnos — hotel? — I watched the hydrofoil circle the island until, in a flash of reflected sunlight, it disappeared behind Haggopian's wedge of white rock. Two hours later the Armenian's man came across in a sleek motorboat to bring me news of my appointment. My luck was indeed holding! I was to attend Haggopian at three in the afternoon; a boat would be sent for me.

At three I was ready, dressed in sandals, cool grey slacks and a white T-shirt — civilized attire for a sunny afternoon in the Aegean — waiting for the motorboat when it returned to the natural rock wharf. On the way out to Haggopian, as I gazed over the prow of the craft down through the crystal-clear water at the gliding, shadowy groupers and the clusters of black sea urchins (the Armenian had

named his hydrofoil after the latter), I did a mental checkup on what I knew of the elusive owner of the island ahead:

Richard Hemeral Angelos Haggopian, born in 1919 of an illicit union between his penniless but beautiful half-breed Polynesian mother and millionaire Armenian-Cypriot father — author of three of the most fascinating books I had ever read, books for the layman, telling of the world's seas and all their multiform denizens in simple, uncomplicated language — discoverer of the Taumotu Trench, a previously unsuspected hole in the bed of the South Pacific almost seven thousand fathoms deep, into which, with the celebrated Hans Geisler, he descended in 1955 to a depth of twenty-four thousand feet — benefactor of the world's greatest aquariums and museums in that he had presented at least two hundred and forty rare, often freshly discovered specimens to such authorities in the last fifteen years, etc., etc....

Haggopian the much married — three times, in fact, and all since the age of thirty — an unfortunate man, apparently, where brides were concerned. His first wife (British) died at sea after nine years of wedded life, mysteriously disappearing overboard from her husband's yacht in calm seas on the shark-ridden Barrier Reef in 1958;

number two (Greek-Cypriot) died in 1964 of some exotic wasting disease and was buried at sea; and number three — one Cleanthes Leonides, an Athenian model of note, wed on her eighteenth birthday — had apparently turned recluse, since she had not been seen publicly for more than two years.

Cleanthes Haggopian — yes! Expecting to meet her, should I ever be lucky enough to get to see her husband, I had checked through dozens of old fashion magazines for her photographs. That had been a few days ago in Athens, and now I recalled her face as I had seen it in those pictures — young, natural, and beautiful in the Classic Greek tradition. She was a “honey,” and again, despite rumors that she was no longer living with her husband, I found myself anticipating our meeting.

In no time at all the flat white rock of the island loomed to some thirty feet out of the sea, and my navigator swung his fast craft over to the left, passing between two jagged points of salt-incrusted rock standing twenty yards or so out from Haggopiana’s most northerly tip. As we rounded the point, I saw that the east face of the island was formed of a white sand beach, with a pier at which the *Echinoidea* was moored. Set back from the beach in a cluster of pomegranate, almond, locust and olive trees, there sat an

immensely vast and sprawling flat-roofed bungalow.

At the dry end of the pier my quarry waited, until with the very slightest of bumps the motorboat pulled in to mooring. He wore grey flannels and a white shirt with the sleeves rolled down. A wide, silken, scarlet cummerbund was bound about his waist. His thin nose supported heavy, opaquely lensed sunglasses. So this was the great man: Haggopian — tall, awkward-seeming, bald, extremely intelligent and very, very rich — his hand already outstretched in greeting.

He was something of a shock. I had seen photographs of him of course, quite a few, and had often wondered at the odd sheen such pictures had seemed to give his features. In fact the only decent pictures I had seen of Haggopian had been pre-1958, and I had taken the quality of later shots as being simply the result of poor photography; his rare appearances in public had always been very short ones and unannounced, so that by the time cameras were clicking or whirring he was usually making an exit. Now I could see that I had short-changed the photographers. He did have a sheen to his skin, and there must also be something wrong with his eyes. Small tears glistened on his cheeks, rolling thinly down from behind the dark lenses. He carried in his left hand a

square of silk with which, every now and then, he would dab at this telltale dampness. All this I saw as I approached him along the pier, so that right from the start I found him — strange.

“How do you do, Mr. Belton?”

His voice was a thick, heavily accented rasp, conflicting with his polite inquiry and manner of expression. “I am sorry you have had to wait so long, but I am afraid I could not delay my work...”

“Not at all, sir, I’m sure this meeting will amply repay my patience.”

His handshake was unpleasant, though I tried my best to keep him from seeing it, and after he turned to lead me up to the house, I unobtrusively wiped my hand on the side of my T-shirt. Patently that sheen to the man’s skin was the result of sun oil. His hand had seemed greasy. An allergy, perhaps, which might also explain the dark-tinted sunglasses.

I had noticed from the boat a complex of pipes and valves between the sea and the house, and now, approaching that sprawling yellow building in Haggopian’s wake, I could hear the muffled throb of pumps and the gush of water. Once inside the huge, refreshingly cool bungalow, it became apparent just what the sounds meant. The place was nothing less than a gigantic

aquarium.

Massive glass tanks, some of them room length and ceiling high, lined the walls, so that the sunlight filtering through from exterior porthole-like windows entered the room in greenish shades that dappled the marble floor and gave the place an eerie, submarine aspect.

There were no printed cards or boards to describe the finny dwellers in the huge tanks, and as he led me from room to room it became clear why such labels were unnecessary. Haggopian knew each specimen intimately, his rasping voice making a running commentary as we visited in turn the bungalow’s many wings.

“An unusual coelenterate, this one, from five hundred fathoms. Difficult to keep alive — pressure and all that. I call it *Physalia haggopia* — quite deadly. If one of those tentacles should even brush you...*phhhh!* Makes a water baby of the Portuguese man-o-war.” (This of a great purplish mass with trailing, wispy-green tentacles, undulating horribly through the water of a tank of huge proportions.) Haggopian, as he spoke, deftly plucked a small fish from an open tank on a nearby table, throwing it up over the lip of the greater tank to his “unusual coelenterate.” The fish hit the water with a splash, swam down

and straight into one of the green whips — and instantly stiffened! In a matter of seconds the hideous jellyfish had settled on its prey to commence a languid ingestion.

“Given time,” Haggopian gratingly commented, “it would do the same to you!”

In the largest room of all — more a hall than a room proper — I paused, literally astonished at the size of the tanks. Here, where sharks swam through brain and other coral formations, the glass of these miniature oceans must have been very thick. Backdrops had been arranged to give the impression of vastly sprawling submarine vistas.

In one tank hammerheads of over two meters in length were cruising slowly from side to side, ugly as hell and looking twice as dangerous. Metal steps led up to and over this tank’s rim, then down the other side and into the water itself. Haggopian must have seen the puzzled expression on my face, for he said, “This is where I used to feed my lampreys — they had to be handled carefully. I no longer have them; I returned the last of my specimens to the sea three years ago.”

Three years ago? I peered closer into the tank as one of the hammerheads slid his belly along the glass. There on the white and silver underside of the fish, between

the gill slits and down the belly, numerous patches of raw red showed, many of them forming clearly defined circles where the close-packed scales had been recently removed and the sucker-like mouths of lampreys had been at work. No, Haggopian’s “three years” had no doubt been a slip of the tongue — three days, more like!

I stopped pondering my host’s mistake as we passed into another room whose specimens must surely have delighted any conchologist. Again tanks lined the walls, smaller than the others I had so far seen but marvelously laid out to duplicate perfectly the natural environs of their inhabitants. And these were the living gems of every ocean on earth; great conchs and clams from the South Pacific; tiny, beautifully marked cowries from the Great Barrier Reef; hundreds of weird uni- and bi-valves of every shape and size. Even the windows were of shell — great, translucent, pinkly glowing fan shells, porcelain thin yet immensely strong, from very deep waters — suffusing the room in blood tints different again from the submarine dappling of the previous rooms.

Once more Haggopian showed off his expertise, casually naming any specimens I paused to study and briefly describing their habits and the foreign deeps to which they belonged.

My tour was interrupted here when Costas, the Greek who had brought me from Kletnos, entered this fascinating room to murmur something of obvious importance to his employer. Haggopian nodded his head in agreement, and Costas left, returning a few moments later with half a dozen other Greeks, who each had a few words with Haggopian before departing. Eventually we were alone again.

"They were my men," he told me, "some of them for almost twenty years, but now I have no further need of them. I have paid them their last wages, they have said their farewells, and now they are going away. Costas will take them to Kletnos and return later for you. By then I should have finished my story."

"I don't quite follow you, Mr. Haggopian. You mean you're going into seclusion here? What you said just then sounded ominously final."

"Seclusion? Here? No, Mr. Belton — but final, yes! I have learned as much of the sea as I can from here; my education is almost complete."

He saw the puzzled look on my face and smiled a wry smile. "You are at pains to understand me, and that is hardly surprising. Few men, if any, have known my circumstances before, of that I am reasonably certain. That is why I have chosen to speak now. You are

fortunate in that you caught me at the right time; I would never have taken it upon myself to tell my story had I not been so persistently pursued — there are horrors best unknown — but perhaps the telling will serve as a warning. It gives me pause, the number of students devoted to the lore of the sea who would emulate my works and discoveries." He frowned, pausing for a moment.

"Tomorrow, when the island is deserted, Costas will return and set all the living specimens loose. There are means here by which even the largest fishes might be returned to the sea. Then Haggopiana will be truly empty."

"But to what end?" I asked. "And where do you intend to go? Surely this island is your base, your home and stronghold? It was here you wrote your wonderful books, and —"

"My base and stronghold, as you put it, yes!" He harshly cut me off. "The island has been these things to me, Mr. Belton, but my home? No longer! When your interview is over, I shall walk to the top of the rocks and look once more at Kletnos, the closest land mass of any reasonable size. Then I will take my *Echinoidea* and guide her out through the Kasos Straits on a direct and deliberate course until her fuel runs out. There can be no turning back. There is a place

unsuspected in the Mediterranean, where the sea is so deep and cool, and where —”

He broke off and turned his glistening face to me. “But there, at this rate the tale will never be told. Suffice to say that the last trip of the *Echinoidea* will be to the bottom — and that I shall be with her.”

“Suicide?” I gasped, barely able to keep up with Haggopian’s revelations. “You intend to — drown yourself?”

At that he laughed, a rasping cough of a laugh that jarred like chalk on a blackboard. “Drown myself? Is a watery grave so distasteful, then?” He laughed again.

For a few moments I stared at him in dumb amazement and concern, uncertain as to whether I stood in the presence of a sane man or...

He gazed at me intently through the dark lenses of his glasses, and under the scrutiny of those unseen eyes I slowly shook my head, backing off a step.

“I’m sorry, Mr. Haggopian, I just...”

“Unpardonable,” he rasped as I struggled for words, “my behavior is unpardonable. Come, Mr. Belton, perhaps we can be comfortable out here.” He led me through a doorway and out onto a patio surrounded by lemon and

pomegranate trees. A white garden table and two cane chairs stood in the shade. Haggopian clapped his hands together once, sharply, then offered me a chair before seating himself opposite. Again I noticed that the man’s movements seemed oddly awkward.

An old woman, wrapped around Indian-fashion in white silk and with the lower half of her face veiled in a shawl that fell back over her shoulders, answered the Armenian’s summons. He spoke a few guttural but gentle words to her in Greek. She went, stumbling a little with her years, to return shortly with a tray, two glasses, and (amazingly) an English beer with the chill still on the bottle.

I saw that Haggopian’s glass was already filled, but with no drink I could readily recognize. The liquid was greenly cloudy — sediment literally swam in his glass — and yet the Armenian did not seem to notice. He touched glasses with me before lifting the stuff to his lips and drinking deeply. I too took a deep draft, for I was very dry, but when I had placed my glass back on the table I saw that Haggopian was still drinking! He completely drained off the murky, unknown liquid, put down the glass and again clapped his hands in summons.

At this point I found myself wondering why the man did not

remove his sunglasses. After all, we were in the shade, had been even more so during my tour of his wonderful aquarium. A glance at the Armenian's face served to remind me that he must suffer from some allergy, for again I saw those thin trickles of liquid flowing down from behind the enigmatic lenses.

The silence was broken when the old woman came back with a further glass of murky fluid for her master. He spoke a few more words to her before she once more left us. I could not help but notice, though, as she bent over the table, how very dehydrated the woman's face looked, with pinched nostrils, deeply wrinkled skin, and dull eyes sunk deep beneath the bony ridges of her eyebrows. An island peasant woman, obviously. She seemed to find a peculiar magnetism in Haggopian, leaning towards him noticeably, visibly fighting to control an apparent desire to *touch* him whenever she came near him.

"She will leave with you when you go. Costas will take care of her."

"Was I staring?" I guiltily started, aware suddenly of an odd feeling of unreality and discontinuity. "I'm sorry — I didn't intend to be rude."

"No matter — what I have to tell you makes non.sense of all matters of sensibility. You strike me as a man not easily...*frightened*,

Mr. Belton?"

"I can be surprised, Mr. Haggopian, and shocked — but frightened? Well, among other things I have been a war correspondent for some time, and —"

"Of course, I understand — but there are worse things than the man-made horrors of war."

"That may be, but I'm a journalist. It's my job. I'll take a chance on being — frightened."

"Good! And please put aside any doubts you may by now have conceived in regards to my sanity, or any you may yet conceive during the telling of my story."

I started to protest but he quickly cut me off. "No, no, Mr. Belton! You would have to be totally insensible not to have perceived the — strangeness here."

He fell silent as for the third time the old woman appeared, placing a pitcher before him on the table. This time she almost fawned on him, and he jerked away from her, nearly upsetting his chair. He rasped a few harsh words in Greek, and I heard the strange, shriveled creature sob as she turned to stumble away.

"What on earth is *wrong* with the woman?"

"In good time, Mr. Belton," he held up his hand, "all in good time." Again he drained his glass, refilling it from the pitcher before

commencing his tale proper, a tale through which I sat for the most part silent, later hypnotized, and eventually horrified to the end.

"My first ten years of life were spent in the Cook Islands, and the next five in Cyprus," Haggopian began, "always within shouting distance of the sea. My father died when I was sixteen, and though he had never acknowledged me in his lifetime, he willed to me the equivalent of two and one half millions of pounds sterling. When I was twenty-one, I came into this money and found that I could now devote myself utterly to the ocean — my one real love in life. By that I mean *all* oceans, all great waters...

"At the end of the war I bought Haggopiana and began to build my collection here. I wrote about my work, and I was twenty-nine years old when I finished *The Cradle Sea*. It was my success with that book — I used to enjoy success — and with *The Sea: A New Frontier* which prompted me to commence work upon *Denizens of the Deep*. I had been married to my first wife for five years by the time I had the first rough manuscript of my work ready, and I could have published the book there and then but for the fact that I had become something of a perfectionist both in my writing and in my studies. In short, there were passages in the manuscript,

whole chapters on certain species, with which I was not satisfied.

"One of these chapters was devoted to the sirenians. The manatee in particular had fascinated me for a long time, in respect of its undeniable connections with the mermaid and siren legends of old renown; from which, of course, the order takes its name. However, it was more than merely this initially that took me off on my 'Manatee Survey,' as I called those voyages, though at that time I could never have guessed at the importance of my quest. As it happened, my inquiries were to lead me to the first real pointer to my future — a frightful hint of my destination, though of course I never recognized it as such." He paused.

"Destination?" I felt obliged to fill the silence. "Literary or scientific?"

"My *ultimate* destination."

"Oh."

I sat and waited, not quite knowing what to say, an odd position for a journalist. After a moment Haggopian continued, and as he spoke I could feel his eyes staring at me intently through the opaque lenses.

"You are aware of the theories of continental drift — those concepts originating in Wegener and Lintz, modified by Vane, Matthews and others — which have it that the continents are gradually

floating apart and that they were once much closer to one another? Such theories are sound, I assure you. Primal Pangaea did exist, trodden by feet other than those of men. Indeed, that first great continent knew life before man first swung down from the trees and up from the apes.

"But at any rate, it was partly to further the work of Wegener and the others that I decided upon my 'Manatee Survey' — a comparison of the manatees of Liberia, Senegal and the Gulf of Guinea with those of the Caribbean and the Gulf of Mexico. You see, Mr. Belton, of all the shores of Earth these two are the only coastal stretches where manatees occur in their natural state; excellent zoological evidence for continental drift.

"Well, I eventually found myself in Jacksonville on the East Coast of North America, which is just about as far North as the manatee may be found in any numbers. In Jacksonville, by chance, I heard of certain strange stones taken out of the sea — stones bearing weathered hieroglyphs of fantastic antiquity, presumably washed ashore by the back currents of the Gulf Stream. Such was my interest in these stones and their possible source — you may recall that Mu, Atlantis and other mythical sunken lands and cities have long been favorite

themes of mine — that I quickly concluded my 'Manatee Survey' to sail to Boston, Massachusetts, where I had heard a collection of such oddities were kept in a private museum. There, when I saw those ancient stones bearing evidence of primal intelligence, I knew that I had conclusive proof of the floating-continent theories. *For I had known traces of that same intelligence in places as far apart as the Ivory Coast and the Islands of Polynesia!"*

For some time Haggopian had been showing a strange and increasing agitation, and now he sat wringing his hands and moving restlessly in his chair. "Ah, yes, Mr. Belton — was it not a discovery? For as soon as I saw those basalt fragments I *recognized* them! They were small, those pieces, yes, but the inscriptions upon them were the same as I had seen cut in the great black pillars of Geph in the coastal jungles of Liberia — pillars long uncovered by the sea and about which, on moonlit nights, the natives cavorted and chanted ancient liturgies. I had known those liturgies, too, Belton, from my childhood in the Cook Islands — *Ia-R'lyeh! Cthulhu fhtagn!"*

With this last thoroughly alien gibberish fluting weirdly from his lips the Armenian had risen suddenly to his feet, his head aggressively forward and his

knuckles white as they pressed down on the table. Then, seeing the look on my face as I quickly leaned backwards away from him, he slowly relaxed and finally fell back into his seat as though exhausted. He let his hands hang limp and turned his face to one side.

For at least three minutes Haggopian sat like this before turning to me with the merest half-apologetic shrug of his shoulders. "You — you must excuse me, sir. I find myself very easily given these days to over-excitement."

He took up his glass and drank, then dabbed again at the rivulets of liquid from his eyes before continuing. "But I digress; mainly I wished to point out that once, long ago, the Americans and Africa were Siamese twins, joined at their middle by a lowland strip which sank as the continental drift began. There were cities in those lowlands, do you see? And evidence of those prehistoric places still exists at the points where once the two masses co-joined. As for Polynesia, well, suffice to say that the beings who built the ancient cities — beings who seeped down from the stars over inchoate eons — once held dominion over all the world. But they left other traces, those beings, queer gods and cults and even stranger — residua.

"However, quite apart from

these vastly interesting geological discoveries, I had, too, something of a *genealogical* interest in New England. My mother was Polynesian, you know, but she had old New England blood in her too. My great-great-grandmother was taken from the islands to New England by a deck hand on one of the old East India sailing ships in the late 1820s, and two generations later my grandmother returned to Polynesia after her American husband died in a fire. Until then the line had lived in Innsmouth, a decaying New England seaport of ill repute, where Polynesian women were anything but rare. My grandmother was pregnant when she returned to the islands, and the American blood came out strongly in my mother.

"I mention all this because... because I cannot help but wonder if something in my genealogical background has to do with...

"You see, I had heard many strange tales in Polynesia as a child — tales of *things* that come up out of the sea to mate with men, and of their terrible progeny!"

For the second time a feverish excitement made itself apparent in Haggopian's voice and attitude; and again his agitation showed as his whole body trembled, seemingly in the grip of massive, barely repressed emotions.

"*Ia-R'lyeh!*" he suddenly burst out again in that unknown tongue.

"What monstrous things lurk even now in the ocean deeps, Belton, and what other things *return* to that cradle of earthly life?"

Abruptly he stood up to begin pacing the patio in his swaying, clumsy lope, mumbling gutturally and incoherently to himself and casting occasional glances in my direction where I sat, very disturbed now by his obviously aberrant mental condition, at the table.

At that distinct moment of time, had there been any easy means of escape, I believe I might quite happily have given up all to be off Haggopiana. I could see no such escape, however, and so I nervously waited until the Armenian had calmed himself sufficiently to resume his seat. Again moisture was seeping in a slow trickle from behind the dark lenses, and once more he drank of the unknown liquid in his glass before continuing.

"Once more I ask you to accept my apologies, Mr. Belton, and I crave your pardon for straying so wildly from the principal facts. I was speaking before of my book, *Denizens of the Deep*, and of my dissatisfaction with certain chapters. Well, when finally my interest in New England's shores and mysteries waned, I returned to that book and especially to a chapter concerning ocean parasites. I

wanted to compare this specific branch of the sea's creatures with its land-going counterpart and to introduce, as I had in my other chapters, oceanic myths and legends that I might attempt to explain them away.

"Of course, I was limited by the fact that the sea cannot boast so large a number of parasitic or symbiotic creatures as the land. Nonetheless, I dealt with the hagfish and lamprey, with certain species of fish leech, whale lice and clinging weeds, and I compared them with fresh-water leeches, types of tapeworm, fungi and so on. Now, you might be tempted to believe that there is too great a difference between sea and land-dwellers, and of course in a way there is — but when one considers that all life as we know it sprang originally from the sea...?"

"But to continue, in 1956 I was exploring the oceans of the Solomon Islands in a yacht with a crew of seven. We had moored for the night on a beautiful uninhabited little island off San Cristobal, and the next morning, as my men were decamping and preparing the yacht for sea, I walked along the beach looking for conchs. Stranded in a pool by the tide I saw a great shark, its gills barely in the water and its rough back and dorsal actually breaking the surface. I felt sorry for the creature, and even more so

when I saw that it had fastened to its belly one of those very bloodsuckers with which I was still concerned. Not only that, but the hagfish was a beauty! Four feet long if it was an inch and definitely of a type I had never seen before. By that time *Denizens of the Deep* was almost ready, and but for that chapter I have already mentioned the book would have been at the printers long since.

"Well, I could not waste the time it would take to tow the shark to deeper waters, but nonetheless I pitied the great fish. I had one of my men put it out of its misery with a rifle. Goodness knows how long the parasite had fed on its juices, gradually weakening it until it had become merely a toy of the tides.

"As for the hagfish — he was to come with us. Aboard my yacht I had plenty of tanks to take bigger fish than him, and of course I wanted to study him and include a mention of him in my book.

"My men managed to net the strange fish without too much trouble and took it aboard, but they seemed to be having some difficulty getting it back out of the net and into one of the sunken tanks. I went over to give a hand before the fish expired, and just as it seemed we were sorting the tangle out, the creature began thrashing about. It came out of the net with one great flexing of its body — and

took me with it into the tank!

"My men laughed at first, naturally, and I would have laughed with them — *if that awful fish had not in an instant fastened itself on my body, its suction pad mouth grinding high up on my chest and its eyes boring horribly into mine!*"

After a short pause, during which Haggopian's face worked hideously, he continued.

"I was delirious for three weeks after they dragged me out of the tank. Shock? — poison? I did not know at the time. *Now* I know, but it is too late; possibly it was too late even then.

"My wife was with us as cook, and during my delirium, as I feverishly tossed and turned in my cabin bed, she tended me. Meanwhile my men kept the hagfish — a previously unknown species of *Myxinoidea* — well supplied with small sharks and other fish. They never allowed the cyclostome to completely drain any of its hosts, you understand, but they knew enough to keep the creature healthy for me no matter its loathsome manner of taking nourishment.

"My recovery, I remember, was plagued by recurrent dreams of monolithic submarine cities, Cyclopean structures of basaltic stone peopled by strange hybrid beings,

part human, part fish and part batrachian; the amphibious Deep Ones, minions of Dagon and worshippers of dreaming Cthulhu. In these dreams, too, eerie voices called out to me and whispered things of my forebears — things which made me scream through my fever at the hearing.

"After I recovered the times were many I went below decks to study the hagfish through the glass slides of its tank. Have you ever seen a hagfish or lamprey close up, Mr. Belton? No? Then consider yourself lucky. They are ugly creatures, with looks to match their natures, eellike and primitive — and their mouths, Belton — their horrible, rasplike, sucking mouths!

"Two months later, toward the end of the voyage, the horror really began. By then my wounds, the raw places on my chest where the thing had had me, were healed completely; but the memory of that first encounter was still terribly fresh in my mind, and —

"I see the question written on your face, Mr. Belton, but indeed you heard me correctly — I did say my *first* encounter. Oh, yes — there were more encounters to come."

At this point in his remarkable narrative Haggopian paused once more to dab at the rivulets of moisture seeping from behind his sunglasses and to drink yet again from the cloudy liquid in his glass.

It gave me a chance to look about me; I still sought an immediate escape route should such become necessary.

The Armenian was seated with his back to the great bungalow, and as I glanced nervously in that direction, I saw a face move quickly out of sight in one of the smaller porthole windows. Later, as Haggopian's story progressed, I was able to see that the face in the window belonged to the old servant woman and that her eyes were fixed firmly upon him in a kind of hungry fascination. Whenever she caught me looking at her, she withdrew.

"No," Haggopian finally went on, "the hagfish was far from finished with me — far from it. For as the weeks went by, my interest in the creature grew into a sort of obsession, so that every spare moment found me staring into its tank or examining the curious marks and scars it left on the bodies of its unwilling hosts. And so it was that I discovered how those hosts were *not* unwilling. A peculiar fact, and yet —

"Yes, I found that having once played host to the cyclostome, the fishes it fed upon were ever eager to resume such *liaisons*, even unto death! When I first discovered this odd circumstance, I experimented, and I was later able to establish quite definitely that following the

initial violation the hosts of the hagfish submitted to subsequent attacks with a kind of soporific pleasure.

"Apparently, Mr. Belton, I had found in the sea the perfect parallel of the vampire of land-based legend. Just what this meant, the utter *horror* of my discovery, did not dawn on me until — until —

"We were moored off Limassol in Cyprus prior to starting on the very last leg of our trip, the voyage back to Haggopiana. I had allowed the crew — all but one man, Costas, who had no desire to leave the yacht — ashore for a night out. My wife, too, had gone to visit friends in Famagusta. Myself, I was happy enough to stay aboard; I had known a tired feeling, a lethargy, for a number of days.

"I went to bed early. From my cabin I could see the lights of the town and hear the gentle lap of water about the legs of the pier at which we were moored. Costas was drowsing aft with a fishing line dangling in the water. Before I dropped off to sleep I called out to him. He answered, in a sleepy sort of way, to say that there was hardly a ripple on the sea and that already he had pulled in two fine mullets....

"When I regained consciousness, it was three weeks later, and I was back here on Haggopiana. The hagfish had had me again. They told me how Costas had heard the

splash and found me in the cyclostome's tank. He had managed to get me out of the water before I drowned, but had needed to fight like the very devil to get the monster off me — or rather, *to get me off the monster!*

"Do the implications begin to show, Mr. Belton?

"You see this?" He unbuttoned his shirt to show me the marks on his chest — circular scars of about three inches in diameter, like those I had seen on the hammerheads — and I stiffened in my chair, my mouth falling open in shock as I saw their great number. Down to the silken cummerbund just below his rib cage he unbuttoned his shirt, and barely an inch of his skin remained unblemished; some of the scars even overlapped.

"Good God!" I finally gasped.

"Which God?" Haggopian instantly rasped across the table, his fingers trembling again in that strange passion. "Which God, Mr. Belton? Jehovah or Oannes — the Man-Christ or the Toad-Thing — God of Earth, Air or Water? *Ia-R'yeh, Cthulhu fhtagn, Yibb-Tstill, na Yot-Sottot!* I know many gods, sir!"

Again, jerkily, he filled his glass from the pitcher, literally gulping at the sediment-loaded stuff until I thought he must choke. When finally he put down his empty glass, I could see that he had himself once

more under a semblance of control.

"That second time," he continued, "everyone believed I had fallen into the tank in my sleep, and this was by no means a wild stretch of the imagination; as a boy I had been something of a somnambulist. At first even I believed it was so, for at that time I was still blind to the creature's power over me. They say that the hagfish is blind, too, Mr. Belton, and members of the better known species certainly are — but *my* hag was not blind. Indeed, primitive or not, I believe that after the first three or four times he was actually able to recognize me! I used to keep the creature in the tank where you saw the hammerheads, forbidding anyone else entry to that room. I would pay my visits at night, whenever the — *mood* — came on me; and he would be there, waiting for me, with his ugly mouth groping at the glass and his queer eyes peering out in awful anticipation. He would go straight to the steps as soon as I began to climb them, waiting for me restlessly in the water until I joined him there. I would wear a snorkel, so as to be able to breathe while he...while it —"

Haggopian was trembling all over now and dabbing angrily at his face with his silk handkerchief. Glad of the chance to take my eyes off the man's oddly glistening features, I finished off my drink

and refilled my glass with the remainder of the beer in the bottle. The chill was long off the beer by then. The drink had gone flat. I drank solely to relieve my mouth of its clammy dryness.

"The worst of it was," he went on after a while, "that what was happening to me was not against my will. As with the sharks and other host fish, so with me. I *enjoyed* each hideous liaison as the alcoholic enjoys the euphoria of his whisky; as the drug addict delights in his delusions; and the results of my addiction were no less destructive! I experienced no more periods of delirium, such as I had known following my first two 'sessions' with the creature, but I could feel that my strength was slowly but surely being sapped. My assistants knew that I was ill, naturally — they would have had to be stupid not to notice the way my health was deteriorating or the rapidity with which I appeared to be aging — but it was my wife who suffered the most.

"I could have little to do with her, do you see? If we had led any sort of normal life, then she must surely have seen the marks on my body. That would have required an explanation, one I was not willing — indeed, unable — to give. Oh, but I waxed cunning in my addiction, and no one guessed the truth behind the strange 'disease'

which was slowly killing me, draining me of my life's blood.

"A little over a year later, in 1958, when I knew I was on death's very doorstep, I allowed myself to be talked into undertaking another voyage. My wife loved me deeply still and believed a prolonged trip might do me good. I think that Costas had begun to suspect the truth by then; I even caught him one day in the forbidden room, staring curiously at the cyclostome in its tank. His suspicions were obvious when I told him that the creature was to go with us. He was against the idea from the start. I argued that my studies were incomplete, that I was not finished with the hag and that eventually I intended to release the fish at sea. I intended no such thing. In fact, I did not believe I would last the voyage out. From fifteen stone in weight I was down to nine.

"We were anchored off the Great Barrier Reef the night my wife found me with the hagfish. The others were asleep after a birthday party aboard. I had insisted that they all drink and make merry so that I could be sure not to be disturbed, but my wife had taken very little to drink, and I had not noticed. The first thing I knew of it was when I saw her standing at the side of the tank, looking down at me and the ...*thing*! I will always remember her

face, the horror and awful *knowledge* written upon it, and her scream, the way it split the night!

"By the time I got out of the tank she was gone. She had fallen or thrown herself overboard. Her scream had roused the crew, and Costas was the first to be up and about. He saw me before I could cover myself. I took three of the men and went out in a little boat to look for my wife. When we got back, Costas had finished off the hagfish. He had taken a great hook and gaffed the thing to death. Its head was little more than a bloody pulp, but even in death its suctorial mouth continued to rasp away — at nothing!

"After that, for a whole month, I would have Costas nowhere near me. I do not think he *wanted* to be near me — I believe he knew that my grief was not solely for my poor wife...

"Well, that was the end of the first phase, Mr. Belton. I rapidly regained my weight and health, the years fell off my face and body, until I was almost the same man I had been. I say 'almost,' for of course I could never be exactly the same. For one thing I had lost all my hair — as I have said, the creature had depleted me so thoroughly I had been on death's very doorstep — and also, to remind me of the horror, there were the scars on my body and a greater

scar on my mind. The look on my wife's face when last I had seen her.

"During the next year I finished my book, mentioning nothing of my discoveries during the course of my 'Manatee Survey,' nothing of my experiences with the awful fish. I dedicated the book to the memory of my poor wife, but yet another year was to pass before I could get the episode with the hagfish completely out of my system. From then on I could not bear even to think back on my terrible obsession.

"It was shortly after I married for the second time that phase two began...

"For some time I had been experiencing a strange pain in my abdomen, between my navel and the bottom of my rib cage, but had not troubled myself to report it to a doctor. I have an abhorrence of doctors. Within six months of the wedding the pain had disappeared — to be replaced by something far worse.

"Knowing my terror of medical men, my new wife kept my secret, and though we neither of us knew it, that was the worst thing we could have done. Perhaps if I had seen about the thing sooner —

"You see, Mr. Belton, I had developed — yes, an organ! An *appendage*, a snoutlike thing had grown out of my stomach, with a tiny hole at its end like a second

navel! Eventually, of course, I was obliged to see a doctor, and after he examined me and told me the worst, I swore him — or rather, I paid him — to secrecy. The organ could not be removed, he said, it was part of me. It had its own blood vessels, a major artery and connections with my lungs and stomach. It was not malignant in the sense of a morbid tumor. Other than this he was unable to explain the snoutlike thing away. After an exhaustive series of tests, though, he was further able to say that my blood, too, had undergone a change. There seemed to be far too much salt in my system. The doctor told me then that by all rights I ought not to be alive.

"Nor did it stop there, Mr. Belton, for soon other changes started to take place — this time in the snoutlike organ itself — when that tiny navel at its tip began to open up!

"And then...and then...my poor wife...and my eyes!"

Once more Haggopian had to stop. He sat there gulping like — *like a fish out of water!* — with his whole body trembling violently and the thin streams of moisture trickling down his face. Again he filled his glass and drank deeply of the filthy liquid; once more he wiped at his ghastly face. My own thoughts had gone very dry again, and even if I had had anything to

say, I do not believe I could have managed it.

"I — it seems — you—" the Armenian half gulped, half rasped, then gave a weird, harshly choking bark before finally settling himself to finishing his unholy narrative. Now his voice was less human than any voice I had ever heard before:

"You — have — more nerve than I thought, Mr. Belton, and — you were right: you are not easily shocked or frightened. In the end it is I who am the coward, for I cannot tell the rest of the tale. I can only — *show* you, and then you must leave. You can wait for Costas at the pier..."

With that Haggopian slowly stood up and peeled off his open shirt. Hypnotized, I watched as he began to unwind the silken cummerbund at his waist, watched as his — *organ* — came into view, as it blindly groped in the light like the snout of a rooting pig! But the thing was not a snout.

Its end was an open, gasping mouth — red and loathsome, with rows of rasplike teeth — and in its sides breathing gill slits showed, moving in and out as the thing sucked at thin air!

Even then the horror was not at an end, for as I lurched reelingly to my feet, the Armenian took off those hellish sunglasses. For the first time I saw his eyes: *his bulging fish eyes — without whites, like jet*

marbles, oozing painful tears in the constant ache of an alien environment — eyes adapted for the murk of the deeps!

I remember how, as I fled blindly down the beach to the pier, Haggopian's last words rang in my ears; the words he rasped as he threw down the cummerbund and removed the dark-lensed sunglasses from his face: "Do not pity me, Mr. Belton," he had said, "the sea was ever my first love, and there is much I do not know of her even now — but I will, I will. And I shall not be alone of my kind among the Deep Ones. There is one I know who awaits me even now, and one other yet to come!"

On the short trip back to Kletnos, numb though my mind ought to have been, the journalist in me took over, and I thought back to Haggopian's hellish story and its equally hellish implications. I thought of his great love of the ocean, of the strangely cloudy liquid with which he so obviously sustained himself, and of the thin film of protective slime which glistened on his face and presumably covered the rest of his body. I thought of his weird forebears and the exotic gods they had worshiped, of "*things* that came up out of the sea to mate with men!" I thought of the fresh marks I had seen on the undersides of the

sharks in the great tank, marks made by no ordinary parasite, for Haggopian had returned his lampreys to the sea all of three years earlier; and I thought of that second wife who, rumor had it, died of some "exotic wasting disease." Finally, I thought of those other rumors I had heard of his *third* wife; how she was no longer living with him — but of the latter it was not until we docked at Kletnos proper that I learned how those rumors, understandable though the mistake was, were in fact mistaken.

For it was then, as the faithful Costas helped the old woman from the boat, that she stepped on her trailing shawl. That shawl and her veil were one and the same garment, so that her clumsiness caused a momentary exposure of her face, neck and one shoulder to a point just above her left breast. In that same instant of inadvertent

unveiling, I saw the woman's face for the first time — and also the livid scars where they began just beneath her collarbone.

At last I understood the strange magnetism Haggopian had held for her, that magnetism not unlike the unholy attraction between the morbid hagfish of his story and its all too willing hosts. I understood, too, my previous interest in her dehydrated face, which yet had classic features — for now I could see that it was the face of a certain Athenian model lately of note! Haggopian's third wife, wed to him on her eighteenth birthday. And then, as my whirling thoughts flashed back yet again to that second wife, "buried at sea," I knew finally, cataclysmically what the Armenian had meant when he said: "There is one who awaits me even now, and one other yet to come!"



OLD AHAB'S FRIEND, AND FRIEND TO NOAH, SPEAKS HIS PIECE

A Celebration of Man in Space by Ray Bradbury

At night he swims within my sight
And looms with ponderous jet across my mind
And delves into the waves and deeps himself in dreams;
He is and is not what he seems
The White Whale, stranger to my life,
Now takes me as his writer-kin, his feeble son,
His wifing-husband, husband-wife.
I swim with him. I dive. I go to places never seen,
And wander there, companion to a soundless din
Of passages, of currents, and of seas beneath a sea.
I linger under-down and gone until the dawn;
Then, with a lumbering of flesh, old Moby turns him round,
Peers at me with a pale, lugubrious eye
As if to say: God pinions thee.
Your soul against your flesh, your flesh against the sea,
The sea nailed down to land in passionate lashings of its stuff.
You are mere snuff. I sneeze thee!
You are the snot of Time, but, once exhaled, O, Miracles!
You build a spine and stand you tall and Name Yourself.
What matters it the name? You are my sequel on the Earth.
The sea is mine. The land belongs to you.
All compass themselves round in one electric view.
I am the greatest soul that ever ventured here,
But now your soul is greater, for it *knows*,
And knows that it knows that it knows.
I am the exhalation of an end.
You are the inhalation of a commencement of a beginning,
A flowering of life that will never close.
I stay in waters here and salt myself with tides
For dinners of Eternity to eat me up;
While your soul glides, you wander on,
You take the air with wings,
Test fires, roar, thrash, and leap upon the Universe Itself!
And, breathing, move in breathless yammerings of broadcast Space;
Among the energies of abyss-void you bound and swim
And take a rocket much like me
The White Whale building out of steel and loxxed with energy
And skinned all round with yet more metal skin
And lit within and filled with ventings of God's shout.
What does He say?

Run away. Run away.
Live to what, fight?
No. Live to live yet *more*, another day!
Stay not on tombyard Earth where Time proclaims:
Death! Death to Moby! Clean his polar bones!
Doom to the White Whale!
Sail on. Who was it said that? Sail, sail on, again,
Until the Earth is asterisk to proclamations
Made by God long years before a Bible scroll
Or ocean wave unrolled;
Before the merest sun on primal hearth was burned
And set to warm the Hands Invisible.
I stay. I linger on, remain;
Upon my rumpled brow my destiny is riven deep
In hieroglyphs by hammerings of God
Who, ambled on my head, did leave His mark.

I am the Ark of Life!
Old Noah knew me well.
Do not look round for ruins of his ancient craft.
I kept his seed, his love, his wild desires by night,
His need.

He marched his lost twinned tribes of beasts
Two and two and two within my mouth;
Once shut, there in the Mediterranean North,
I took me South,
And waited out the forty days for dove to touch my skin
And tell by touching: Earth has perished.
Earth is washed
As clean as some young virgin's thighs from old night and sin.

Noah looked out my eye and saw the bird aflutter there
With green of leaf from isle somewhere at sea.
I swam me there and let them forth
Two by two, two by two, two by two.
O how they marched, endlessly.

I am the Ark of Life. You be the same!
Build you a fiery whale all white.
Give it my name.
Ship with Leviathan for forty years
Until an isle in Space looms up to match your dreams,
And land you there triumphant with your flesh
Which works in yeasts, makes wild ferment,
Survives and feeds
On metal schemes.

Step forth and husband soil as yet untilld,
Blood it with your wives, sow it with seeds,
Crop-harvest it with sons and maiden daughters,
And all that was begat once long ago in Earth's strange waters
Do recall.

The White Whale was the ancient Ark.

You be the New.

Forty days, forty years, forty-hundred years,

Give it no mind;

You see. The Universe is blind.

You touch. The Abyss does not feel.

You hear. The Void is deaf.

Your wife is pomegranate. The stars are lifeless and bereft.

You smell the Wind of Being.

On windless worlds the nostrils of old Time are stuffed

With dust and worse than dust.

Settle it with your lust, shape it with your seeing,

Rain it with your sperming seed,

Water it with your passion,

Show it your need.

Soon or late,

Your mad example it may imitate.

And gone and flown and landed there in White Whale craft,
Remember Moby here, this dream, this time which does suspire,
This kindling of your tiny apehood's fire.

I kept you well. I languish and I die.

My bones will timber out fresh dreams,

My words will leap like fish in new trout streams

Gone up the hill of Universe to spawn.

Swim o'er the stars now, spawning man,

And couple rock, and break forth flocks of children on the plains

On nameless planets which will now have names;

Those names are ours to give or take.

We out of Nothing make a destiny,

With one name over all

Which is this Whale's, all White.

I you begat.

Speak then of Moby Dick,

4 Tremendous Moby, friend to Noah.

Go. Go now.

Ten trillion miles away,

Ten light-years off,

See! from your whale-shaped craft;

That glorious planet!

Call it Ararat.

THE TRIUMPH OF THE MOON

Last night (as I write this) I stood on the deck of the Holland-American liner, *Statendam*, seven miles off Cape Kennedy, and watched Apollo 17 rise into the air like the biggest fire-fly in creation. It lit the sky from horizon to horizon, turned the ocean an orange-gray and the sky into an inverted copper bowl from which the stars were blanked out.

Slowly, it rose on its tail of fire, and it was well up in the sky before the first shaking rumble reached us some forty seconds after ignition and shook us savagely.

Mankind was making its attempt to reach the Moon a sixth time and place an eleventh and twelfth man upon it. It was the last launching of the Apollo series (and the only night launching, hence incredibly spectacular, and I was delighted to have seen it). It may be decades before mankind returns to the task — after establishing a space station that would make it possible to reach the Moon more easily, more economically, and more elaborately.

And as I stood on deck watching Apollo 17 become a star among stars in a freshly darkened sky, while the hot gantry glowed

ISAAC ASIMOV

SCIENCE



forlornly on the low shoreline, a spasm of guilt swept me.

It was not so long ago that I wrote "The Tragedy of the Moon" (F & SF, July 1972) in which I described how and why man would have advanced so much farther if only the Moon had circled Venus rather than the Earth. Yet that was only one side of the story. The Moon has had its triumphs, too, if we accept man as the measure of all things, for at three crises in the development of man it was the Moon that was, in one way or another, the motive force.

To begin with, man might conceivably not exist at all if Earth had had no Moon. The dry land might have remained untenanted.

Life began in the sea some three billion years ago or more, and for at least 80 percent of its entire history on this planet, it remained in the sea. Life is adapted for the surface layers of the ocean, primarily, and only by the power of versatile adjustment over many generations has it succeeded in colonizing the surface's borderlands — downward into the abyss, outward into the fresh water rivers and lakes, and outward-upward into the land and air.

Of the borderlands, dry land must in its way have been most exotic; as impossible to sea life as the surface of the Moon is to us. If we imagine a primitive sea creature intelligent enough to have speculated about land life, we can be sure he would be appalled by the prospect. On land, an organism would be subjected to the full and eternal pull of gravity, to the existence of wild oscillations of temperature both daily and yearly, to the crushing need to get and retain water in an essentially water-free environment, to the need to get oxygen out of dry and desiccating air rather than out of mild water solution.

Such a sea creature might imagine itself emerging from the sea in a water-filled land-suit, with mechanical grapples to support him against gravity, insulation against temperature change and so on.

The sea life of half a billion years ago had, however, no technology to help it defeat the land. It could only adapt itself over hundreds or thousands of generations to the point where it could live on land unprotected.

But what force drove it to do so, in the absence of a deliberate decision to do so?

The tides.

Life spread outward into the rims of the ocean, where the sea water rose up against the continental slopes and then fell back twice each day.

And thousands of species of seaweed and worms and crustaceans and mollusks and fish rose and fell with those tides. Some were exposed on shore as the sea retreated, and of those a very few survived because they happened, for some reason, to be best able to withstand the nightmare of land existence until the healing, life-giving water returned.

Species adapted to the temporary endurance of dry land developed, and the continuing pressure of competition saw to it that there was survival value to be gained in developing the capacity to withstand dry land conditions for longer and ever longer periods.

Eventually, species developed which could remain on land indefinitely. About 425 million years ago, plant life began cautiously to green the edges of the continent. Snails, spiders, insects developed to take advantage of a new food supply. Some 400 million years ago, certain fish were crawling on new-made limbs over the soggy mud flats.

(Actually, we are descended from fresh water creatures who probably came to endure land as a result of the periodic drying of ponds, but they could have completed the colonization only because the tides had already populated the continents and produced an ecology to become part of.)

And, of course, the tides are the product of the Moon. The Sun, to be sure, also produces tides, one-third the size of those produced by the Moon today, but that smaller to-and-fro wash of salt water would represent a smaller drive toward land and might have led to the colonization of the continents much later in time, if at all.

Indeed, hundreds of millions of years ago, when land life was evolving, the Moon was surely closer to Earth and the tides were considerably more ample. It is even possible that the Moon was captured late in the existence of life ("The Great Borning," September 1967) and that it was the long period of giant tides that followed which produced the necessary push for the colonization of the land.*

The second crucial effect of the Moon came some time in the Paleolithic period when men were food-gathering primates, perhaps not noticeably more successful than others of the class. Man's primitive ancestors were already the brainiest land creatures that ever lived, but it is

**I wonder if, when we explore the Galaxy, we will find life universally present, on all Earth-like planets, but always sea life. I wonder if we'll find that land life requires that most unlikely event, the capture of a large moon, and that we are therefore alone in the Galaxy after all.*

possible to argue that brains in themselves are not necessarily the best way of insuring survival. The chimpanzee is not as successful in the evolutionary scheme of things as the rat, nor the elephant as the fly.

For man to become successful, for man to establish himself as the ruler of the planet, it was necessary for him to use his brain as something more than a device to make the daily routine of getting food and evading enemies a little more efficient. Man had to learn to control his environment; that is, to observe and generalize and give birth to a technology. And to sharpen his mind to that point, he began to number and measure. Only by numbering and measuring could he begin to grasp the notion of a universe that could be understood and manipulated.

Something was needed for a push toward numbering, as once something had been needed for a push toward dry land.

Man would have to notice something orderly that he could grasp — something orderly enough to enable him to predict the future and give him an appreciation of the power of the intellect.

One simple way of seeing order is to note some steady, cyclic rhythm in nature. The simplest, most overbearing such cycle is, clearly, the alteration of day and night. The time must have come when some man (or man-like ancestor) began to have the *conscious* knowledge that the Sun would certainly rise in the east after having set in the west. This would mean the consciousness of time, rather than the mere passive endurance of it. It would surely mean the beginning of the *measurement* of time, perhaps the measurement of anything, when an event could be placed as so many Sunrises ago or as so many to come.

Yet the day-night cycle lacks subtlety and is too overwhelming and black and white (literally) to call out the best in man. Of course, if men observed *very* closely, they might notice that the day lengthened and shortened and that night shortened and lengthened in what we would today call a yearly cycle. They might associate this with the changing height of the midday Sun and with a cycle of seasons.

Unfortunately such changes would be hard to grasp, hard to follow, hard to determine. The length of the day and the position of the Sun would be hard to measure in primitive days; the seasons depend on many factors that tend to obscure their purely cyclic nature over the short run; and in the tropics, where man developed, all these changes are minimal.

But there is the Moon. The Sun is glorious, but cannot be looked at. The stars are unchanging points of light. The Moon, however, is an object of soft and glowing light that *changes its shape steadily*.

The fascination of that changing shape, accompanied by a changing position in the sky relative to the Sun, had to attract attention. The slow death of the Moon's crescent as it merged with the rising Sun and the birth of a *new* Moon from the Solar fire of sunset may have given mankind the first push toward the notion of death and rebirth that lies at the basis of so many religions.

The birth of each new Moon (still so-called), as a symbol of hope, may have exercised the emotions of early man sufficiently to give him the overwhelming urge to calculate in advance when that new Moon would come so that he might greet it with glee and festival.

The new Moons come sufficiently far apart, however, for the matter to prove an exercise in counting; and the count is large enough to make it advisable to use notches in a piece of wood or bone. Furthermore, the number of days is not unvarying. Sometimes, the interval is 29 days between new Moons, sometimes 30. With continued counting, however, a pattern will appear.

Once the pattern has been established, it will eventually be seen that every twelve new Moons will include a cycle of seasons (it is easier to count and understand twelve new Moons than 365 days). And yet the fit is not right, either. With twelve new Moons the seasons drift forward. Sometimes a thirteenth new Moon must be added.

Then, too, every once in a while the Moon goes into eclipse. (Since eclipses of the Moon can be seen all over the world at once while eclipses of the Sun — roughly equal in number — can be seen only in some particular narrow region only, from a given spot on Earth one sees many more eclipses of the Moon than of the Sun.)

The eclipse of the Moon, its comparatively rapid death at the moment of complete maturity (the eclipse *always* comes when the Moon is full) and the equally rapid rebirth must have had enormous impact on primitive people. It would have been important for them to know when such a significant event would occur, and calculations must have had to reach a new level of subtlety.

It is not surprising, then, that early efforts to understand the Universe concentrated on the Moon. Stonehenge may have been a primitive observatory serving as a large device to predict lunar eclipses accurately. Alexander Marshak has analyzed the markings of ancient bones and has suggested that they were primitive calendars marking off the new Moons.

There is thus good reason to believe that man was first jolted into calculation and generalization by the need to keep track of the Moon; that

from the Moon came calendars; from that mathematics and astronomy (and religion, too); and from that, everything else.

As the Moon made man possible as a physical being through its tides, it made him an intellectual being through its phases.

And what else? I promised three crises, and for the third, let us move still further forward in time to the point where human civilization was in full career.

By the 3rd millennium B.C., the first great civilization, that of the Sumerians in the downstream reaches of the Tigris-Euphrates valley, was at its peak. In that dry climate, the night-sky was uniformly and brilliantly visible, and there was a priestly caste which had the leisure to study the heavens and the religious motivation to do so.

It was they, in all likelihood, who first noticed that although most of the stars maintained their configurations for night after night indefinitely, five of the brighter ones shifted position steadily, night after night, relative to the rest. This represented the discovery of the planets, which they distinguished with the names of gods, a habit we have kept to this day. They noted that the Sun and the Moon also shifted position steadily with reference to the stars, so that they were considered planets, too.

The Sumerians were the first (possibly) to begin to follow the motions of all the planets, rather than the Moon only, and to attempt the far more complicated task of generalizing and systematizing planetary motion rather than Lunar motion. This was continued by the later civilizations inheriting their traditions until the Chaldeans, who ruled the Tigris-Euphrates valley in the 6th Century B.C. had a well-developed system of planetary astronomy.

The Greeks borrowed astronomy from the Chaldeans and elaborated it further into a system which Claudius Ptolemy put into its final form in the 2nd Century A.D.

This Ptolemaic system placed the Earth at the center of the universe. Earth was supposed to be surrounded by a series of concentric spheres. The innermost held the Moon, the next Mercury, then Venus, the Sun, Mars, Jupiter, and Saturn in that order. The outermost held the fixed stars. Many subtle modifications were added to this planetary scheme.

Now let's consider the objects in the heavens, one by one, and see how they would impress the early observer. Suppose, first, that only the stars existed in the sky.

In that case, there would be no reason whatever for any astronomer,

whether Sumerian or Greek, to assume that they were anything other than what they appeared to be — luminous dots of light against a black background. The fact that they never changed their position relative to one another, even after long periods of observation, made it reasonable to suppose that the sky was a black solid sphere enclosing the earth and that the stars were imbedded in that solid sky like tiny luminous thumbtacks.

It would be further reasonable to suppose the sky and its embedded stars to be a mere covering, and that the Earth, and the Earth *alone*, made up the essential universe. It had to be *the* world, the only existent thing man could inhabit.

When Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter, and Saturn were discovered and studied, they added nothing startlingly new to this picture. They moved independently so they could not be affixed to the sky. Each had to be embedded in a separate sphere, one inside the other, and each of these spheres had to be transparent since we could see the stars through them all.

These planets, however, were merely additional stars to the primitive observer. They were brighter than the others and they moved differently, but they had to be only additional luminous points. Their existence did not interfere with the view of the Earth as the only world.

What about the Sun, though?

That, it had to be admitted, is unique in the heavens. It is not a dot of light, but a circle of light, many millions of times as bright as any star. When it was in the sky, it painted the sky blue and washed out any mere dot of light.

And yet, although the Sun was much *more*, it was not much *different*. All the stars and planets, and the Sun, too, were composed of light while the Earth was dark. The heavenly bodies were changeless, while all on Earth corrupted, decayed and changed. The heavenly bodies moved round and round, while objects on Earth either rose or fell. Heaven and Earth seemed fundamentally different.

About 340 B.C., Aristotle set the distinction in a fashion that held good for two thousand years. The Earth, he said, was made of four basic constituent elements: earth, water, air and fire. The heavens, however, and everything in them, were made of a fifth element, peculiar to itself and completely different from the four of Earth. This fifth element is "ether" from a Greek word meaning "glowing."

This glowingness, or luminosity, which seemed so fundamental to heavenly bodies as opposed to Earthly ones, extended to temporary

denizens of the heavens, too. Meteors existed only momentarily, but they were flashes of light. Comets might come and go and have strange shapes, but those shapes were luminous.

Everything, it seemed, conspired to show the heavens to be separate and the Earth to be the only world.

— Except the Moon.

The Moon does not fit. Like the Sun, it is more than a mere dot of light. It can even be a full circle of light, though it is then hundreds of thousands of times less bright than the Sun. Unlike the Sun or anything else in the heavens, however, the Moon changes its shape regularly.

Sooner or later, the question must have arisen: Why does the Moon change its shape?

Undoubtedly, man's first thought would be that what *seemed* to happen, *did* happen; that every month a new Moon was born from the fires of the Sun.

Some unnamed Sumerian might have had his doubts, however. The complete and careful study of the Moon's position in the sky as compared to the Sun must have made it quite clear that the luminous portion of the Moon was always that portion that faced the Sun.

It would appear that as the Moon changed position relative to the Sun, progressively different portions were illuminated, and this progressive change resulted in change of phases as seen from the Earth.

If the phases of the Moon were interpreted in this fashion, it appeared that the Moon was a sphere that shone only by light reflected from the Sun. Only half the sphere was illuminated by the Sun at any one time, and this illuminated hemisphere shifted position to produce the succession of phases.

If any proof were needed to substantiate this, it could be found in the manner in which, at the time of the crescent Moon, the rest of the Moon's body could sometimes be made out in a dimly red luminosity. It was there but was simply not being illuminated by the Sun.

By Greek times, the fact that the Moon shone only by reflected light from the Sun was accepted without question.

This meant that the Moon was *not* an intrinsically luminous body as all the other heavenly bodies seemed to be. It was a *dark* body, like Earth. It shone by reflected light, like Earth. (In fact, the dim, red glow of the dark Moon at the time of the crescent, resulted from the bathing of that part of the Moon in Earthlight.)

Then, too, the Moon's body, unlike that of the Sun, showed clear and

permanent markings, dark splotches that marred its luminosity. This meant that, unlike the other heavenly bodies, the Moon was visibly imperfect, like the Earth.

It was possible to suppose, then, that the Moon, at least, was a world as the Earth was one; that the Moon, at least, might bear inhabitants as Earth did. Even in ancient times, then, the Moon (and the Moon alone) gave man the notion of a multiplicity of worlds. Without the Moon, the notion might never have arisen before the invention of the telescope.

Aristotle, to be sure, did not put the Moon in a class with the Earth, but considered it to be composed of ether. One might argue that the Moon was closer to Earth than any other heavenly body was, and therefore absorbed some of the imperfections of Earthly elements, developing stains and losing the capacity for self-illumination.

But then Greek astronomy advanced further. About 250 B.C., Eratosthenes of Cyrene used trigonometric methods for calculating the size of the Earth. He came to the conclusion that the Earth had a circumference of 25,000 miles and, therefore, a diameter of 8,000 miles. This was essentially correct.

In 150 B.C., Hipparchus of Nicaea used trigonometric methods to determine the distance of the Moon. He decided the distance of the Moon from the Earth was about thirty times the diameter of the Earth. This, too, was essentially correct.

If the work of Hipparchus and Eratosthenes is combined, then the Moon is 240,000 miles from Earth and to appear to be its apparent size, it must be a little over 2000 miles wide. It was a *world*! Whatever Aristotle said, it was a world in size at least.

It is not surprising, then, that by the time Claudius Ptolemy was publishing his grand synthesis of Greek astronomy, Lucian of Samosata was writing a popular romance involving a trip to an inhabited Moon. Indeed, once the Moon was recognized as a world, it was an easy further step to assume that other heavenly bodies were worlds as well.

Yet it is the Moon — *only* the Moon — that is close enough to Earth for its distance to be estimated by trigonometric methods based on unaided eye observations. Without the Moon, it would have been impossible to gain any knowledge whatever of the distance and size of any heavenly body prior to the invention of the telescope. And without the nudge of knowing the Moon's distance and size might there have been quite the urge to explore the heavens even after the telescope was invented and used for military purposes?

Then, in 1609, Galileo did press the telescope into astronomic service for the first time.

Galileo studied the heavens and found that, through his telescope, the planets, which seemed to be dots of light when viewed by the unaided eye, appeared to be distinctly formed spheres of light. What's more, Venus, at least, was so located with respect to the Earth, as to show phases like those of the Moon; phases, moreover, plainly related to its position with respect to the Sun.

The conclusion seemed inevitable. All the star-like planets — Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter and Saturn — were worlds like the Moon. They appeared as mere dots of light because they were so much farther from us than the Moon was.

This, in itself, was not fatal to the Aristotelian view, for it could be argued that the planets (and the Moon,) however large they were, and however non-luminous, were nevertheless composed of ether.

What really destroyed the ethereal concept, once and for all, however, was Galileo's observation of the Moon. (Indeed, he looked at the Moon first of all.) On the Moon, Galileo saw mountains and dark smooth areas he interpreted as seas. The Moon was clearly, *visibly*, a world like Earth — imperfect, rough, mountainous.

It is no wonder, then, that with this second blow dealt by the Moon, the concept of the plurality of worlds took another giant step forward. The 17th Century saw the beginning of a set of novels dealing with manned voyages to the Moon that grew steadily more sophisticated and has not ceased right down to the present day.

Of course, you might say that Galileo would have demonstrated the plurality of worlds, by telescope, even if the Moon had not existed, and that the resistance of the Aristotelians would have broken as telescopes improved and as other tools were invented.

Suppose that were the case. Science-fiction writers might then have dreamed of flights to Mars or Venus, instead of to a non-existent Moon. But dreams are only dreams, after all. Would man have attempted to make space flights a *reality* if the Moon had not existed?

The Moon is less than a quarter of a million miles from us. Venus, on the other hand, is 25 million miles away, even when it is at its closest (at intervals of a year and a half). It is then a hundred times as far from us as the Moon is. Mars, at its times of closest approach, is farther still. Every thirty years or so, when it is particularly close, it is 35 million miles away.

It takes three days to reach the Moon. It would take at least six months to reach Venus or Mars.

It has taken heroic measures for men to reach the Moon. Would it have been reasonable to expect them to have made the many-times-multiplied heroic measures necessary to reach Venus or Mars from scratch!

No, it is the Moon — the Moon *only* — that made spaceflight possible. It did so first by letting us see that there are other worlds than our own, and then by offering us an easy steppingstone by means of which we can sharpen our techniques and from which, as a base, we can eventually make the much greater assault on the more distant worlds.

The triple triumph of the Moon, then, is that it made it possible for man to exist; it made it possible for him to develop mathematics and science; it made it possible for him to transcend Earth and conquer space.

If, then, in accordance with my earlier essay, "The Tragedy of the Moon," I concluded that it would have been of great use to man to have Venus possess a Moon like ours; by this essay I deny any desire to lose our own.

What would have been ideal would have been for *both* planets to be Moon-accompanied.



Coming Soon

The big news is a stunning new short novel just in from Frederik Pohl, the centerpiece for a Special Frederik Pohl issue that will be scheduled for late summer or early fall. More on this later. Featured next month will be "The White Otters of Childhood," by Michael Bishop, a compelling and fresh novella on the classic after-the-holocaust theme. The July issue is on sale May 31.

Before we turn you over to the spell of this enchanting new story by Doris Buck, we would have you note that, although the title is the same as a recently published book by Margaret Mead, the story and the title were conceived before the book was released and are not meant to draw on the Mead title.

Blackberry Winter

by DORIS PITKIN BUCK

"Were I the winds —"

I heard Abigail sigh like a woman who sees what she covets but should in no wise have. She cast down eyes grey as her gown. I wondered if truly she were despondent or if she dropped her lids to tease me. Her thoughts were no easy matter to read.

"Were I —" She fell silent.

Her braids lay sleek as corn silk against her kerchief. Though desire to stroke them came to me through mine eyes, I felt it even to my fingertips. "What talk!" quoth I quickly, holding my hands stiff at my sides. "And if you were the winds of heaven —"

Her fingers moved quick like leaves in the breeze. She made a noise in her throat that could have passed for air moaning round the corner of a house. "I'd walk in

slippers of silver such as no Puritan wears. I'd move on clouds as though I stepped on stones across a brook. I'd make my way to a forested land —"

"With such trees as are here?"

"Strange trees."

"And? And?" This seemed a pleasant play for all that her fingers moved so curiously.

"Never bid me do this again." Abigail looked me straight in my face. I called her to myself a wren, so small was she.

She said like any housewife, "When we be married, my sister Prue will not grudge me the chest with bands of brass that our grandfather brought by ship from Plymouth to this town of Cambridge, the which you tell me is named for a university in England. I have linen to fill that chest."

I fell in with her mood. "And I have what my mother left me: to wit, six plates of pewter with forks and spoons. No trenchers of wood for thee. Thou shalt eat like a lady, Abigail."

"When we are wed, sweetheart, I'll keep thy plates scrubbed. I'll cease to wander in the wildwood, for the which my sister reproveth me often. Ah," she cried, "never did I dream it was like this to love a man."

"Never change. I love thee as thou art."

She paid little heed. "David, thinkest thou 'twill be a sin of pride if I look often on thy pewter plates?"

I shook my head and smiled, stroking her cheek, seeing in fancy how it would be with us, I coming in with my fowling piece and a brace of quail to a room she made brighter than the firelight. "Ever I'll hunt for the food that pleaseth thee best." That this might be more than empty words I set her on a tuffet of moss and searched till I had a handful of wild strawberries. I fed her as if she were the child she seemed. She lifted the biggest berries to place between my lips. Never fell two deeper in love.

Suddenly she asked, "Why didst fall in love with me instead of Prue?"

I looked at her as though for the first time. Her braids below her cap

were lightish brown. Her sister's were black like jet, heavier than the hair of any woman in Cambridge or Boston. Prue bore herself like to a queen walking to her coronation.

"Were I a patriarch of old," I quipped, "I'd marry ye both."

She sprang away from me.

"Nay, sweet, I meant but a jest."

"Court whom thou wilt." Her small feet stamped. "Go!"

"Perhaps for thy very wildness I love thee, going thy way like winds."

She ran to a brook close by with a tree fallen over it. By good fortune the trunk was sound, for she sprang thereon, never testing with her foot to see if by chance the wood were rotten. Narrower bridge never I saw. She ran to the center, then on a sudden, dizziness took hold of her. She swayed, ready to fall. I plunged in the stream toward her. She looked at me, sparks in her eyes, the which were dark as storm clouds that splash out lightning. Her face was white like a slope of snow.

"Abigail!" I gave a great shout as water rose to my armpits and pushed as it were a man wrestling me whilst I struggled toward her. She whirled to the other side. There she dropped upon the bank. She fixed upon me eyes still full of tempest.

Now while I clambered out,

something most strange befell. The wildwood and the face of my love melted into nothingness. I was upon a height loftier than the mountain Indians call Monadnock. Below me clouds black like midnight whirled in a great ring, the which surrounded an eye of nothingness. The ring moved, going upon its way.

This phantasm — call it what you will — lasted but a moment. And my mind then dwelt on other matters than clouds and heights. I began to softspeak Abigail. I told her no woman in all New England could delight as did she.

"Thou alone hast power over my heart. Never shall I love another. Thou hast not thy like."

At that she leaned toward me a little. "Are not all men liars?"

"Perchance, unless —"

"Wouldst thou take an oath?"

"I do most solemnly swear by the love I hold for thee. I can think of no oath stronger."

"Your words are more precious to me than a ring of purest gold."

We kissed one another, the quarrel over. She told me, her voice most tender, "If thou wert not already mine, to obtain thy love I'd give up —"

"What?"

"My braids, my one beauty."

"Nay." My eyes lingered on her slender fingers, her feet, her large and long grey eyes.

"Mark, I would trade my hair for my heart's desire, did I not already have that."

Again we kissed. I confess at her kisses thoughts of carnal delight did hiss in my soul like snakes.

I trifled not with her innocence. We walked briskly, so I might get to my house and put on dry clothes. All the while she plied me with questions about my studies at Harvard. She knew though I am a tutor and hold the degree of Master, which might content some, my appetite for learning was only the more whetted. I read diligently in the library. Also my friend Dr. Conant, who corresponds with Robert Boyle, devised experiments with me in his laboratory.

That afternoon I talked much to her of chemistry. Anon, I found myself telling her of byways from the line of my own science. "Think, Abigail, what awaits if learning should lead me to the alchemists' stone, by which base metals are transmuted into gold."

Her mouth fell open.

So I told her of alchemic marvels for all that women are no scholars. As I spoke of transmutation, her eyes grew distant and again her fingers fluttered, like to a fledgling lifting its wings. When I had done, she drew down her brows.

"These men who call them-

selves sages," she gave a sniff, "this Roger Bacon and Zosimus of Panopolis, thought they of nothing more daring than changing one metal to another metal?"

Now my jaw dropped. "What would men change a metal to, if not gold?"

She turned from me, her lips upcurling. Anger swelled my heart. Belike it showed in my face. For Abigail hastened to chatter of this and that while I debated in myself if there be any profit speaking with a woman of learned matters.

She pulled at my sleeve. "Thou'st told me naught of women alchemists."

"Women?"

"Yea, what of them?"

"Whoever heard of women studying the works of Paracelsus, of —" Her thought shot from me and left me with my reasoned argument.

"Geoffrey," on a sudden she said.

Now my name being David, I misliked that. As I well knew a young Englishman, thus called, was on his way to our colony of Massachusetts Bay, he having an interest in our fur trade. So much we knew by letter. How Abigail learned of him never to this day have I discovered.

"Geoffrey," she said again. Her lips made of his name a whisper. "What would this new man say, I

wonder, were I to speak of him of women and heathen philosophers?"

"How should I know?" I spoke curtly, amazed at Abigail.

"Mayhap he is also learned, like thee. Mayhap not. I shall find out."

I scowled.

At that she sprang again into my arms. I caught her wrists to kiss them. I laid my cheeks against hers. My lips went seeking. But swifter than my thoughts she leapt from me. I would have run after her, but she was quicker than I in my soggy shoes. I bethought me then, wet and angered, that Abigail would be better did I more often assert myself.

Geoffrey landed one day of early summer. It meant little to me, I being no trader but a scholar. Thus it befell that I encountered him only when the townsfolk went a-junketing to High Hill, this being arranged to show Geoffrey how fair was the land in our colony.

"Where is the newcomer?" I asked as I glanced toward a bend in the road where it wound upward.

"Where would he be but among those who go forward?" Several men laughed. They liked him little. 'Twas easy to see.

I grew curious.

But soon I forgot Geoffrey. For I spied Abigail, who'd failed to wait

for me. She walked with the women, carrying victuals. Though 'twas unlike her, she dragged her feet, thus saying more plainly than with her tongue that 'twas an ill fate to be a beast of burden. Most women accept their lot, but Abigail was never like unto others.

Now had I been sold to Abigail as a slave, I could not more attend to her wants. I lengthened my stride, and when I was abreast I slipped my arms under hers, lifting her burden. I made sure my arms loitered against her arms. I took it that she was far from displeased. This emboldened me to whisper, "What say you? When shall we publish the banns?"

She tossed her head. "Come autumn."

I minded me of her wilfulness that day by the brook and spoke the more firmly. "Nay!"

I but filled her with contrariness. "Then let it be after the first snowfall."

"Be ye not afeared that soon I'll choose a maid less variable?" I put a curb on my tongue but of set purpose let my eyes wander. They lighted on Prue.

I could swear by the Holy Book that Abigail's eyes were ready to send out sparks. Her sweetness and her temper both exceeded the store most women have. Suddenly, careless of the eyes of gossips, she bent her head forward and kissed my

fingers hard. "Lovest thou me?" she murmured scarcely louder than an August wind in a sycamore. "Lovest thou me because I so vary?" She studied my face.

"'Twill all change when thou hast entered the holy estate of matrimony."

Before she could answer, a fellow I'd never clapped eyes on before strode toward us. I saw we'd now be three. The Englishman would have pushed betwixt Abigail and me, save that I gave him no room. I contrived, even carrying the bread she had had on her way up the mountain, to get hold of her elbow. We pushed ahead easily enough.

Meanwhile I took the man's measure. Geoffrey was tall, even as I. Over Abigail's head our eyes met and were on a level. His were deep-set under his brows, like to Abigail's. His hair was dark red, as are some woods from foreign lands. He wore it in what must have been a London fashion — a great mass of curls that fell to his shoulders. Yet there was nothing womanish in his air. I'd heard it rumored he had considerable interest in a hound, a cob, or a girl. From the manner in which he edged toward Abigail on the side away from me, I could of a certainty credit the last.

He had no chance for pranks with her, were he so minded. The women called her, gesturing toward

some kettles. She left us.

Geoffrey said low, "How comes it that thou woorest the younger and plainer sister? Any man can see the elder hath a mind to you."

This thought had sometimes come into my head. Always I dismissed it, deeming it conceit.

"If I may advise you, play at courting Prudence. Abigail will esteem you the more." Albeit he was older than I by some years, he clapped me on the shoulder as we were brothers, yet he looked at me shrewdly, for all that his eyes were wide and blue. I noticed also that ere long he feasted his sight upon the maids higher up the hill, and most often on Abigail herself.

"Prudence is a lass could hold her own with a duchess at the court. I've been at court with my cousins. Ah!" he said, "Ah! the Merry Monarch! There's a man for you. Never his like in England, Ireland, or Wales." He added under his breath, "You may be a proper fellow, but when they're busy on the mountain top, fetch a stave and I'll beat thee at a game of tipcat."

I fathomed his intent. We of the colony set little store by games and such frivolities. Belike the older men would have called me aside to chide me, and who then would be by Abigail's side if she left the older women. I excused myself as having too little skill to interest him. He presently left me.

When all were busy on the summit, I signed to Abigail she could slip away from the kettles, that we might talk in the upland meadow by ourselves. Gladly enough she came. The wind that blows ever in the high places snatched her cap away and frolicked with her hair. Though she lacked the great beauty of stately Prudence, she made a pretty sight, her braids whipped into curls. She flung her arms wide as though she could catch all the High Hill to her rounding bosom. Thickets of blackberries about us were white with multitudes on multitudes of blossoms, as goodly a sight as ever I saw.

But I said only, my eyes on her breasts under a kerchief, "These high places have ever a late season."

"Talk not of seasons like a husbandman. Say rather," she pointed to the bushes and hunted words, "blackberry winter."

I then saw High Hill through her eyes, a world unto itself with here and there a mountain under its snow and anon ranges of them. I notice also that this snow was of a special brightness as though fine-ground silver or diamond were sifted upon it.

I stood close. "Thou art a rare geographer." Belike I loved this madcap because with her beside me, mine eyes seemed wider open.

To keep me from sinful thoughts I asked, "What wouldst thou find if thou wast the wind blowing off the sea from this mount?"

She turned a frightened face toward me. "I prithee, have done."
"Wherefore?"

Her lips trembled, "Because I am afeared."

At that I caught her hands and pressed them hard. "Afeared with me beside thee?"

With her eyes she pleaded, I laughing. At last she whispered, though none were close, "Beg me not for this, dear heart. Truly, to dream I am that wanderer the wind unlooseth something in me."

"This is but a merry pastime — and an innocent pastime for a maid about to become a wife. I do beseech thee, plead for this no more."

Even her distress was a sweet thing. Something drove me to hunt out a thicket, for such there were even on the summit, and before banns or ceremony, make us one. The sweat stood out on my brow — and not from the climb. Veins pounded in my temples. And yet so I loved her that to offer her my respect was even more than to dream of the delights of her flesh. I dared not let the Legions of Darkness possess my mind.

"What lies beyond High Hill?" I questioned, reminding myself too that Abigail was a woman and

should in all things be subject to me.

"Have done," she kept repeating. Her lips quivered.

"Nay, nay. Fly with the North Wind, my girl, or the East. Fly! Fly! 'Tis my command."

Her face paled. She could have been a blossom from her blackberry winter save that her eyes glittered. She exclaimed, "The land beyond High Hill! Look! That far thou canst see. Woods. Farms. In patches a very crazy quilt! And farther: swamps. Lakes blue as summer. Had a storm fingers, it could point out Indian villages. To the north, ice mountains."

She gestured like a mummer. She spoke with authority. I looked to the north. I saw no mountains. She trembled even to her fingertips. Her skin grew transparent. From bloodless lips her breath came in puffs. Had I met her in some foreign city, belike I had hardly known her. I repented me then that I had so pressed her, and against her liking.

Her words came fast. I could not stop her and I would. Never heard I a woman's voice more harsh.

"Green water. With my breath I whip it into whitecaps. They break against ice sailing like ships, as many as be in an armada. They show like castles, like mountains with crags. Sun flashes cold as light

in a white and costly stone. Cold as the ocean that is my plaything." Her voice dropped. "Two great white bears swim toward the shore."

Her jaws moved as though her teeth would chatter. Her hands clawed her lap. Words caught in her throat. Never have I been in a playhouse, but I wondered if Abigail acted before me.

"Through the floating ice — see — passages, great enough for a ship." Her voiced died a-rumbling in her throat.

"Enough. Enough."

She looked me then full in the face. I took her hands and found them cold as a winter river. I chafed them. They warmed not.

"Almost I was the wind that bloweth where it listeth. 'Tis better than to be maid or wife." She twisted her head upon her slender neck. She looked with contempt upon the stew our women stirred. She gripped me with fingers still cold like to January. "Philosophers say — and you have told me — the world and all in it may be one." She groped again as it were after her own thoughts. "One material, what you learned call *prima materia*. Transmute my body to air. Change it, even as Albertus Magnus would change lead to gold."

"How now, wench!" I still held her cold hands. "Thou'st listened to good purpose. But —" I made

myself laugh — "wouldst be willing to have acids from my three alembics poured upon thy small body, even to become some sprite of air?"

"Nay, am I not already part air?" She puffed out her cheeks, then let her breath go. She also tried to laugh.

"Thou mockest thy betters, the sages of old."

"'Tis no mockery. These fancies give feelings in my body such as I have never known." She touched me with the winter of her small fingers. She spoke in a tiny voice. "The feelings — I fear them."

Now I gathered from talk among men that maids may feel desire without understanding until the night of their marriage. So Abigail's words pleased me mightily, though because she was my wife-to-be I left her in ignorance.

She pushed me from her — a sudden push but without anger.

I said, a little stern, "Where is thy cap, Abigail? Set it upon thy head. And thy hand would be the better for a spoon in it."

One of the women had caught Abigail's cap and now held it out. Abigail answered only with nimble feet, dancing as light as breeze, her hair in the sight of all a rippled mantle to her waist. The women admonished, "Thou flibbertigibbet, go with downcast mien."

"I am as the wind, neither more

godly nor less," Abigail replied, her voice a-singing.

And 'twas I who had bid her see like as the compass winds, she all the while beseeching me to let her be.

Behind us we heard a sound as Geoffrey laughed. "Thou'rt not for this place, lass. Come with me to England. There dance thy fill, mayhap before the King himself."

On those words there followed a sudden confusion — a hushing and a sobbing. A runner from a newly docked ship had come panting up the hill with his news. His clothes, of the same fashion as Geoffrey's, with single slashes in the sleeves, were black as a scribe's ink. Whispers started to pass from mouth to mouth. I knew before he opened his lips what he would surely say. "The King is dead."

The women started to wail, for all that His Majesty was of a profligate nature. For the ruler of England is great in his own right, even though he lack the stature of our Lord Protector Cromwell. The men bowed their heads, some shivering. But one voice was raised loud. "Long live the King!" cried Geoffrey.

In a moment he was catching Abigail around her waist. "Go to it, mistress. If the King's dead, what stands between us and dancing at a coronation?"

I wheeled toward him, angered

at his laying his hands on Abigail, angered I knew not why at his quick-shifting allegiance. My fists were up. His went up as fast. His hair flowed behind him like the mane of a dark red beast as he charged at me.

None came between us. We grappled. We traded blow for blow. The length of the hilltop we struggled. Where a ledge of rock jutted out a short way, I clouted him with such strength the blood burst from his mouth and ran on his chin. Soon blood ran from his nostrils. He staggered, then came at me with the fury of all Beelzebub's fiends. I sprang back, nimble as when I was a boy. He aimed a blow between my eyes. I leaped away, twisting my body, and my shoulder caught the blow. For the rest of our bout that shoulder was lamed. I held him off with my right arm and the quickness of my stepping.

All stood still while we fought. I chopped at Geoffrey's face. Ever I was too quick for him. Then on a sudden a briar caught at me, and before I could free myself from its tangle of thorns, my heel slipped and he was upon me. Over the small ledge of rock I tumbled, thudding to the ground, and lay speechless, winded utterly. For the moment all believed me dead.

But Geoffrey gave me no more thought. He snatched Abigail by her wrists and spun her free of the

ground. He swept the maid, her feet in air, in a circle. Faster she turned and yet faster. "Long live the King," shouted Geoffrey again and yet again.

All this the townsfolk told me afterward. I lay unseeing. Yet I knew a ring of cloud, grey as pewter, then greyer, at last black, turned dizzily round me, the eye thereof a dead calm. The black clouds swung, I somehow swinging with them, breathless, giddy and ever more giddy. Storm played about me with lightning incessant. Light glared through my shut lids. The long roll of thunder changed to crash upon crash, the noise merging in my ears, my body all the while buffeted by a hundred tempests. I, a man grown and a scholar, find no reason now for all this.

I waited for Abigail to make some sign of reconciliation. But she kept to herself, while I sought a lost book, *Chema*, dealing with change in substance. Also I missed an alembic. I searched to no avail. So I went about my tutoring and in what time I found free, continued with experiments, until one day Prue burst in upon me with, "Know you aught of my sister?"

"Your sister, dear Prudence? How should I?"

Prudence stood twisting her skirt with fingers that trembled. "Hast been so lost in thy reading that thine ears were stoppered? Our streets buzz with gossip."

I rubbed at my eyes like to one newly waked. "The people say —?" For all I tried to assume a quiet mien, I saw again a hilltop whitened with snow of blackberry in flower and a maiden like to a tempest.

The voice of Prudence did not match my own for calmness. "For four days neither man nor woman has clapped eyes upon her. I've harkened morning and evening for a song from the wildwood. Some say she wanders as was her wont. Some declare my sister was captured by redskins, others that she sailed to England with Geoffrey, boarding his ship by night."

At this I said loudly, "Had she gone to England, with Geoffrey or without him, she would have danced up the gangplank in sight of the whole colony, her skirts all but seething about her."

Prudence talked with me often. "I beseech thee to find Abigail if found she can be." Prue had wept till her eyes, that were of especial beauty, grew red-rimmed and sunken in her head. She tried to be the calm, the lofty sister I had known, but to no avail. Neither of us had any mind to victuals, nor could we sleep at night.

"When this to-do hath passed," quoth one beldam, plucking me by the sleeve, "why not bethink thee of the older sister? With a fine woman like to Prudence, a man's marriage might be calm." But I called to mind certain words that passed between Abigail and me with an oath once in the wildwood. So the time went by, and I waited for Abigail three full years. I wanted not to marry one woman and think of another.

Yet it befell that on a certain day Prudence and I had carnal knowledge of one another. I had intended it not. Nor had she.

We did then set the time to publish the banns. This was in September. The day before our marriage was quiet, which I took to be a good omen, although the weather grew sultry. Following that, it became hotter, for all the season was well along. I remember also a faint grey overcast in the sky.

Now the next morning considerable wind blew when I was in my house, donning fresh linen to go forth and meet Prudence. My door opened as if someone had struck it a buffet. Rain began, and sharply. This would pass, I told myself, belike by eleven. Yet when I tried to close the door, I stood amazed, for looking across the street I saw chimneys of stone topple and even fall. Before my eyes windows were

blown in and glass strewn in street and on planking of floors. Elms snapped off and lay across one another in heaps, disordered even more than jackstraws. The gale raged on with rain increasing like to Noah's flood. This continued for the space of three hours.

Suddenly the storm abated. Men and women came to what was left of their doorways, fell on their knees, and thanked God for deliverance. But my heart misgave me.

The tempest was not done. It smote again, the wind coming directly counter to that it blew at first. Hard work I had to catch a breath. The mirror I made for Prudence was tossed from the wall, lifted high, and dashed down. That mirror was a fair thing, the frame carved by this hand of mine. It lay not better than kindling for firewood, the glass all in splinters like tiny daggers. Beside that the loss of my crockery counted little, though the destruction of my chairs amounted to considerable. Six pewter plates — these a legacy from my mother — that wind bashed on the floor. Even so it ceased not, but tore about the ruins of my chamber. At one time I could declare almost it had a voice. But what it would have said was lost in the cracking of my great roof-beams.

The day following, Prudence said, "Surely Providence sent signs and portents with a mind to hinder our marriage." Providence? thought I, but kept my counsel.

It surprised me little when in two months Prue married another, nor did I overmuch regret. Thereafter if my life was dull, it was placid. In England they spoke well of my researches, albeit carried out in a college surrounded by wilderness. The best of my work is in the reporting of tropical storms, the which have been little studied. It appeareth that these hurricanes travel northward, wreaking great damage and hardship. How good were a system of warnings to be devised! But no signals are swift enough.

With all this to occupy me, I gave up studies in alchemy. Was not the great Hermes Trismegistus, when all's said, but a heathen?

Yet restlessness came upon me so that I besought my friend Dr. Conant to give me leave to wander for some hours or perhaps days on High Hill. He regarded me strangely. "David, let High Hill be."

"Hither must I go."

"But wherefore?"

I shrugged. "I know not."

"Have done with crazy fancies such as now and then possess thee."

"Yet something awaits me."

"Awaits —? Superstition!"

"Superstition." My voice was like to an echo. Yet I went.

I had not climbed High Hill since that summer. Blackberry winter was now over. There were only brambles. They caught at my clothing. When I bent to free myself, I saw I stood on the ledge from which I had once fallen. And I saw more: the corner of a half-buried box of rusting metal. Belike it had been buried more carefully once, then heaved out by frost. I freed it and pried off the cover. It held a discolored alembic long since drained of liquid. Next to it rested my book called *Chema* and a braid with the sleekness and color of corn silk.

From that day I have held but little converse with the learned. Rather I frequent the wharves and listen to sailormen. When I can collect the needed gold, I shall take ship to far-off seas. There I may climb high places to look on water and forest and sand spread below, and feel on my face the wind moving free of any constraint. If it blow up darkness of storm with horrendous vapors to blot out sun and moon, it but fulfills its being. Yet ever shall I hope it will frolic with hillocks of cloud white as land in that season a smooth-haired maid once called blackberry winter.

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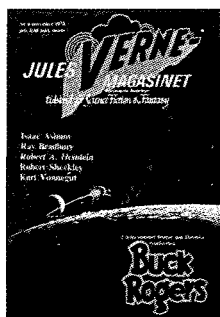
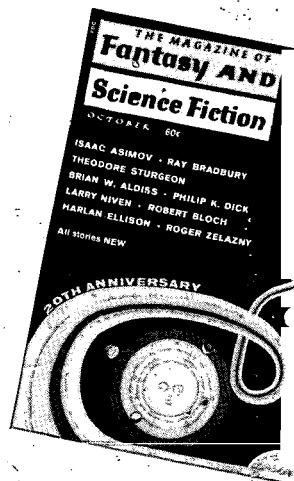


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